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HOW TO STAR IN  
**BASEBALL**







# HOW TO STAR IN BASEBALL

BY HERMAN L. MASIN

Photos by Owen Reed at Long Island University,  
with the cooperation of Coach William T. Lai  
Cover Kodachrome courtesy of Wide World



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# PLAY BALL!

**T**HAT'S a bit of advice nobody really needs. Everyone likes to play baseball. But, unfortunately, most players don't go about it in the right way. They hit, pitch, field, run bases, and throw any old way. And "any old way" isn't always good enough.

To make the most of your native ability, you ought to know *exactly* what you're doing. You should have a mental picture of all the proper fundamentals. Then practice will do the rest.

The purpose of this book is to give you that all-important mental picture. This "picture" of the basic skills is based upon the play of big league stars. Through long experience, they've learned the best and simplest ways of doing things. Here's your chance to benefit by it.

No matter in what league you play—Little League, sandlot, high school, Babe Ruth, Pony, or American Legion—you'll find tips in this book that will help you master your position.

Study the pictures. Soak up the text. Then go out and practice as much as you can. You'll be amazed at the results.

If you've been doing something wrong, change your style immediately—before the fault becomes an unbreakable habit. The best time to make any changes is when you're young and able to adjust your style without any great effort.



STARTING STANCE

# 1

# PITCHING

**N**O MATTER how hard you can throw a ball, you'll never be a pitcher until you master control. All your speed and "stuff" are useless if you cannot get the ball over the plate. So that's the first thing to work on.

How do you master control? There's only one road to success — and that's practice, practice, and practice. Not just throwing the ball but throwing the ball to a target.

The strike zone lies between the batter's armpits and knees, across the width of the plate. In your practice, keep throwing the ball in that zone until you can throw a strike almost every time.

Start with strikes right down the middle. After you've mastered that, switch to high strikes and then low strikes. Don't get fancy; don't try for the corners. Be content with getting the ball over. The rest will come with experience.

Though many pitchers use two or more styles of deliveries, the stars stick to one style. They throw the ball the same way every time. It's easier on the arm and prevents the batter from guessing what kind of pitch is coming. In short, don't throw the fast ball with one motion and the curve ball with another.

Now let's see exactly how to pitch with the least effort and the greatest effectiveness.

■ **Stance:** With no one on base, take a stance squarely facing the batter. Place the front spike of the pitching (pivot) foot over the edge of the rubber, angled out a bit to help your pivot. Set the other (stepping) foot a few inches back of the rubber. Keep the body fairly erect, with the weight forward and the shoulders level.

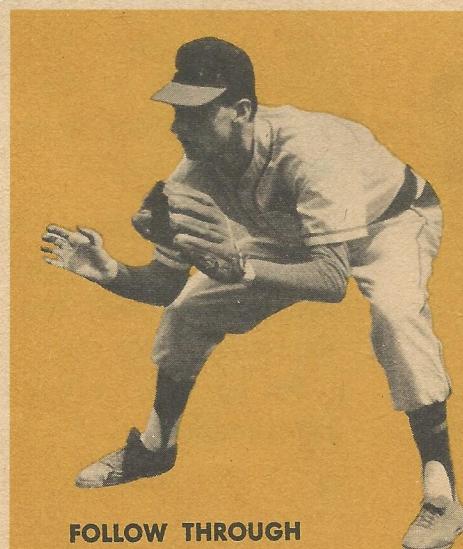
When taking the sign, hide the ball from the batter. Just place it behind the thigh of the pitching foot.

■ **Pump and Pivot:** A short wind-up—one or at most two pumps—loosens the arm and shoulder muscles and helps bring the weight behind the pitch.

In winding up, shift your weight to the front foot and bend the trunk forward. At the same time, swing your arms back. Then shift the weight to the back foot and straighten up. Swing the arms up past the hips and join them overhead.

Make sure to keep the back of the glove turned toward the hitter, thus concealing the ball from him.

Now the pivot begins. Slide



FOLLOW THROUGH

the pitching (front) foot diagonally forward into the hole and turn your body to the right (right-handed pitchers). Then, as your arm goes back, swing the left leg up and around so that you face the batter over the left shoulder. Don't kick your left leg too high; it may throw you off-balance. Use a moderate kick-up.

**Stride:** Just before bringing your pitching arm forward, step straight ahead with your left foot. Hit the ground with it flatly, not on the heel—and *point the toe directly at the plate*. The arm comes through naturally as the body drives hard off the back leg.

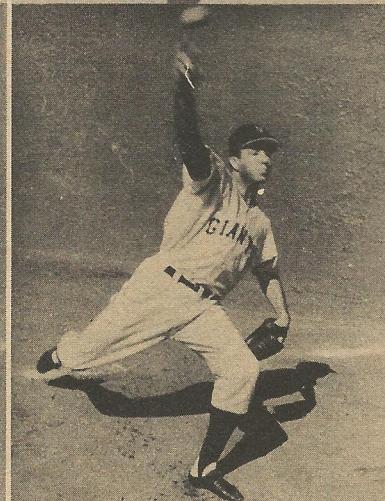
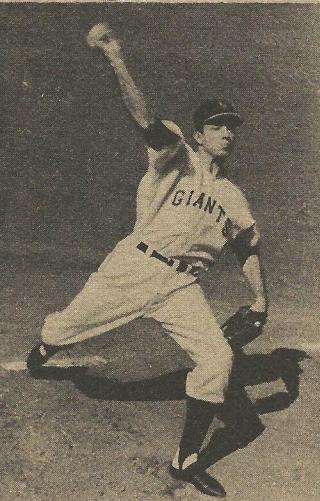
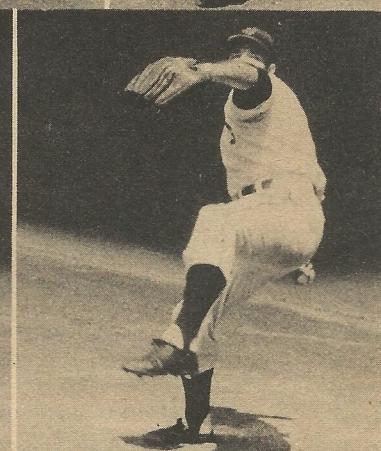
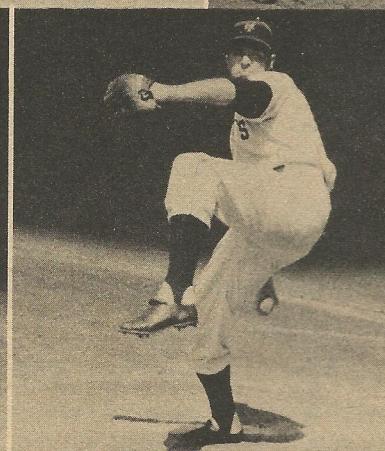
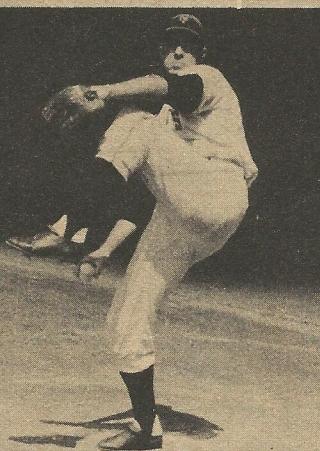
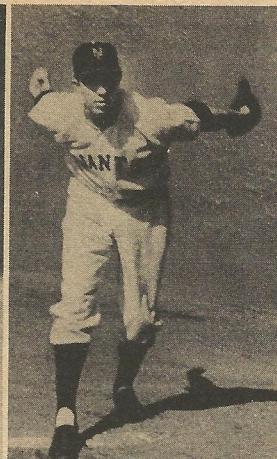
Don't stop jerkily after the ball leaves your hand. Bend your back and let your arm follow through until the hand reaches a point below the knee opposite the pitching shoulder, with the body bent sharply at the waist.

If you've delivered the ball correctly, the pivot foot should wind up slightly ahead of the striding foot. Now bring your glove around to the front of your body and you'll be in a squared-away position, ready to move right or left to field the ball.

Caution: From the time you take the catcher's sign until you square off in the follow-through, *keep your eyes squarely on the target*. Don't let the eyes wander off toward third or down at the ground at any time. Watch that target!

**Sideward Stance:** With men on base, you can't afford to wind up. You must keep the runner(s) close to the bag. And the best way of doing this is with a sideward stance. (see page 9.)

Set up with your left side facing the plate, with the left shoulder turned a bit toward first. Place your pitching



COMPLETE DELIVERY FROM PUMP TO FOLLOW THROUGH

foot (right for righties) as in the forward stance or along the inside of the rubber. Put the left foot forward with the toe slightly opened toward the plate.

You're now facing third base with the feet almost parallel to each other and comfortably spread. The weight is on the back, or pitching, foot.

Hold the hands together about belt high, with the pitching hand gripping the ball in the glove. Turn your head slightly toward the runner (on first) and watch him out of the corner of your left eye. The head may be moved back and forth (at runner, toward plate, back to runner, etc.). But the body must remain still.

If you'd like to loosen your arms with a stretch motion, you may do so. But the arms must come to a complete stop before you deliver the ball.

Don't kick your leg up high when delivering. This will give the runner too much of a start. Deliver with a quick step close to the ground.

Remember this: While in contact with the rubber, whenever you make a move toward first or home, you must throw the ball there. You may fake to second and third.

One other very important thing: When you decide to pitch to the plate, turn your head toward the catcher and deliver the ball. Don't pitch while looking at a base or down at the ground. Always keep your eye on the target.

■ **Grips:** You don't have to have a lot of "stuff" to be a good pitcher. In fact, don't fool around with a lot of "freak" pitches. All you need are a fast ball, curve, and change-of-pace.

Here's a surprise: The ball may be gripped the same

way for all these pitches! That is, you can grip the ball across the seams between the first two fingers and the thumb—spreading the fingers a little.

■ **Fast Ball:** Fast balls are rolled off the ends of the gripping fingers.

■ **Curve:** Hold the ball the same way but grip more tightly with the middle finger. Start the ball like a fast one. But as your arm comes in line with the body, snap your wrist outward. The ball will spin out of the hand from between the thumb and forefinger, with the middle finger and wrist supplying pressure for curving action.

■ **Change of Pace:** There are many different ways of throwing this pitch. But beginners are advised not to try anything fancy at first.

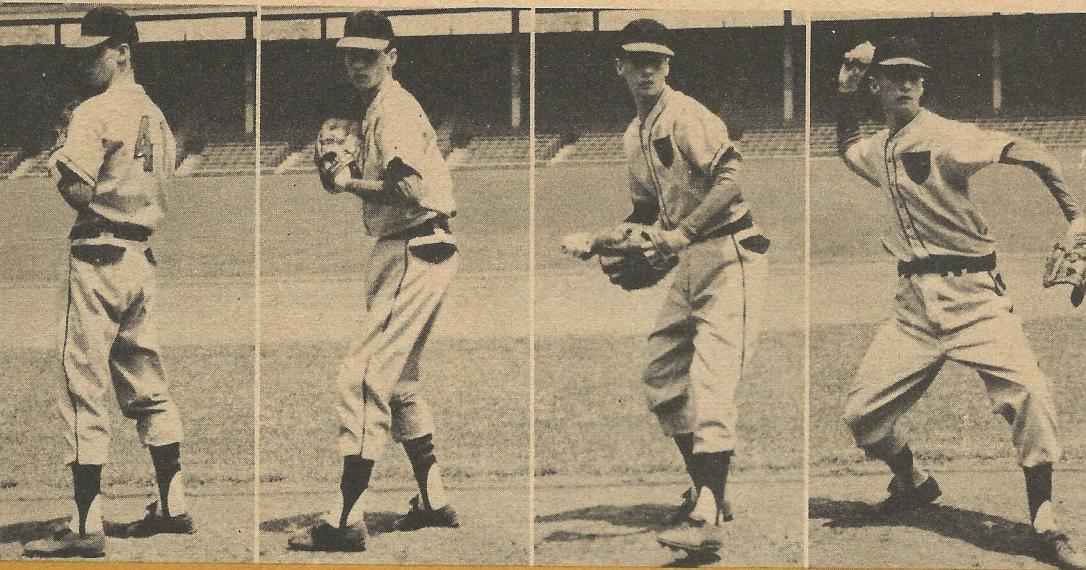
The change-of-pace may be thrown just like the fast ball and curve, but with less effort. Or you may grip the ball well back in the hand, and, as you throw, release the pressure of the first two fingers and throw with a stiff wrist. With the first two fingers doing no work, the ball must come up more slowly.

Many pitchers throw a good change-up by merely using a longer stride and dragging the rear foot.

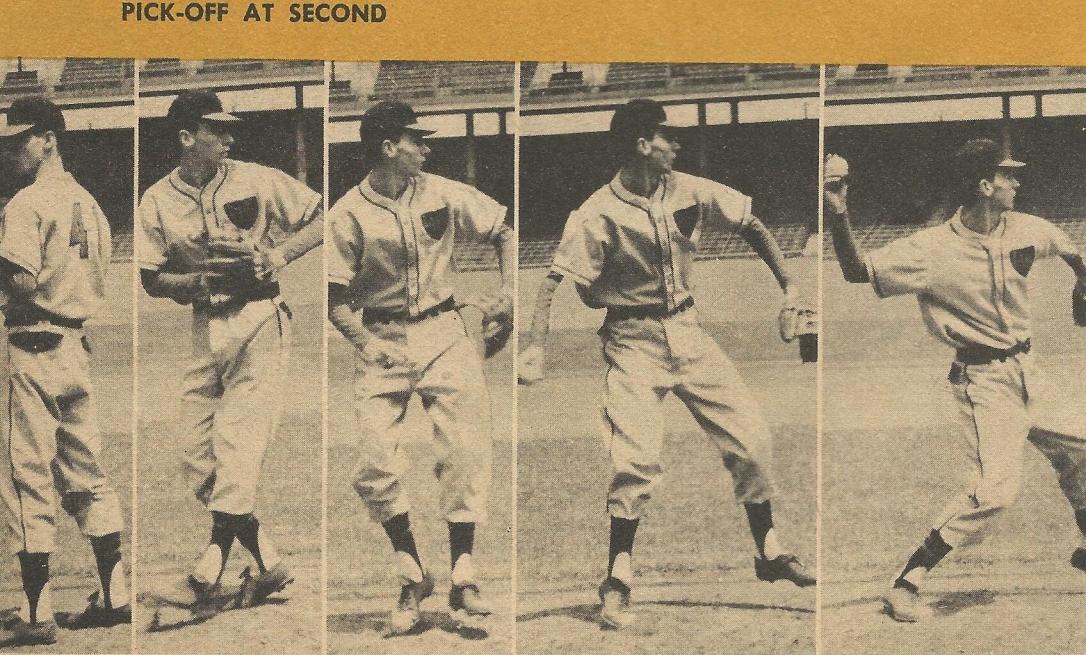
What you want to do is have the batter swing at your motion rather than the pitch. When mixed with a good fast ball, the change-of-pace will keep almost any hitter off stride. If at all possible, keep the change-up low.

■ **Warming Up:** Before pitching a game, take a good warm-up. Practice at the full distance, in the same direction you'll pitch the game.

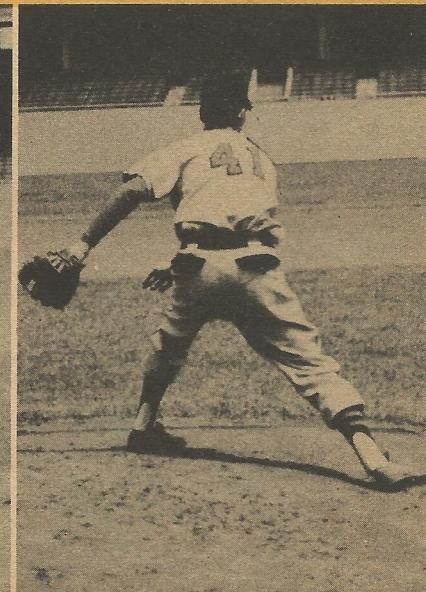




**PICK-OFF AT FIRST**



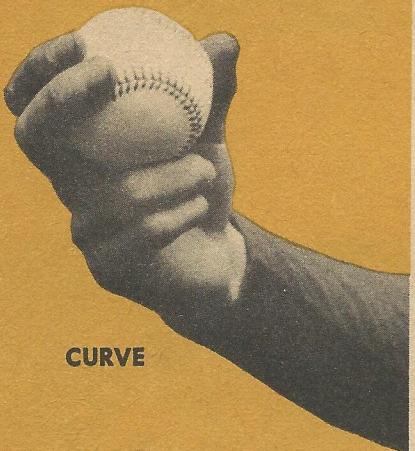
**PICK-OFF AT SECOND**



# GRIPS



FAST BALL



CURVE



LET-UP

Throw for at least ten minutes. Start with easy throws and gradually work up speed. After five minutes of this, you may try spinning the ball. Then work up to a sharp curve.

You may then try out all your stuff. Throw three or four fast balls, curves, and slow balls in a row. Tell the catcher each time you make a change, or you may injure his fingers with a pitch he isn't expecting.

And don't just throw the ball. Aim your pitches just as you would in a game.

When arriving at the box at the start of each inning, take five or six practice throws at medium speed to loosen up. Again aim at some target — perhaps the catcher's knee or shoulder.

Upon retiring the side, put on a jacket to prevent sudden cooling off.

## PITCHING TIPS:

1. Try to make your first pitch a strike to get ahead of the batter immediately.
2. Never ease up and *aim* the ball deliberately; the batter will kill it. If wild, keep firing away naturally. If wild high, shorten your stride. If wild low, make it longer.

3. Move around on the rubber if your control is off. If you're throwing too much inside (to a righty hitter), shift farther to the left on the rubber. If throwing too much outside, shift more to the right on the rubber.
4. Vary the time between your pitches. Don't keep working at the same speed. This will keep the batter guessing a little more and throw off his timing.
5. If the batter moves around to rattle you, just get the ball over for a sure strike.
6. In a tight spot, come in with your best pitch.
7. When you're wasting a pitch, don't make it *too* bad. You want to tempt the batter.
8. If the ball is hit slowly or you fumble it, play it to first—unless otherwise directed by the catcher.
9. In throwing to second on a double play, don't rush your throw. Pivot quickly and throw deliberately—chest high to the fielder covering the bag.
10. Cover the plate on a third-home run-down.
11. Race toward first base on any ball hit to the right side of the infield.
12. Wear a large glove. This will help you cover your pitches and knock down batted balls.
13. If a bunt is in order but you're not sure of it, take your stretch and then step off the rubber. The batter will often give himself away.
14. Don't wander all over the mound, taking signs from any position near the rubber, walking around in circles between pitches. Save all the energy you can for pitching.

# 2 CATCHING

**C**ATCHING is probably the toughest position in the game. The man behind the plate is the quarterback of the team. In addition to handling the pitcher, he calls many plays — throws, cut-offs, etc.

■ **Giving the Sign:** Your first job is to give the pitcher the sign. Assume a squat position with the feet fairly close together and parallel to one another, with the weight over the toes. Keep the knees apart and the trunk slightly forward.

Before giving the sign, tuck up the tail of your chest protector. Otherwise you'll feel uncomfortable.

Now place your gloved hand over the left knee in a comfortable position. This will conceal the signal from the third-base coach.

Give the signal with the right hand against the inside of your right thigh. Don't drop your fingers below the crotch line, or they'll be seen from the rear.

The actual signals may be simple. One finger may mean a fast ball;



two fingers a curve; three fingers or a wiggle of the fingers, a slow ball; and a fist, a pitch-out.

■ **Target:** After giving the sign, rise to a semi-crouch. Don't stay in the squat. You can neither throw or come out fast to field a ball from that position.

Get as close to the batter as possible without getting in his way. Keep the feet comfortably spread with the knees bent and the weight over the balls of the feet. Keep the left foot slightly ahead of the right. This makes it easier to shift into throwing position.

Help the pitcher by presenting a target with your mitt. Place your bare hand at the side of the glove with the fingers semi-clenched (cup). This helps protect them from injury and at the same time permits you to cover the ball quickly and draw it out for the throw.

■ **Catching the Ball:** Catch every ball in the strike zone with the fingers up, and let your hands give with the pitch — bringing the ball into your belt buckle. This makes the umpire's job easier.

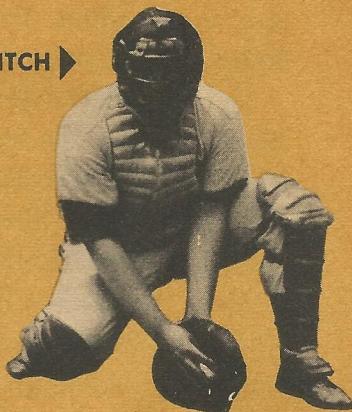
If you cannot handle low strikes with your fingers up, then it's all right to catch them with the fingers down.

■ **Shifting:** The idea is to catch every ball in the middle of your body. And since you don't want to back-hand or reach for a ball unless absolutely necessary, this may require a foot shift. But shift only when the pitch is a sure ball. Don't do it on a borderline pitch, or you may influence the ump to call a ball.





◀ CATCHING HIGH PITCH



CATCHING LOW PITCH ▶

If the pitch is inside (against a righty hitter), move your left foot to the left and drop your right foot back into throwing position.

If the pitch is outside, drop your right foot back and move your left foot over to the right. In short, keep the left foot always ahead of the right so that you can get the ball away in a hurry.

Never cross your feet.

Block low pitches in the dirt with your body, unless a man is stealing. In that case, scoop and throw like an infielder.

■ **Throwing:** A strong arm is a big asset. But the ability to get the ball away quickly and accurately is even more important. That's why it's essential to learn to receive the ball and shift into throwing position in almost one motion.

For the ordinary pitch, throw the weight onto the right

foot and step forward with the left toward the target.

Don't wind up. Draw the ball back near the ear and whip it overhand with a strong forearm and wrist action. Don't throw sidearm to second base. It puts too much strain on the arm and produces curved, inaccurate throws.

If possible, deliver the ball about knee level to the inside of the bag. Don't wait for the infielder to get there. It's his job to cover in time.

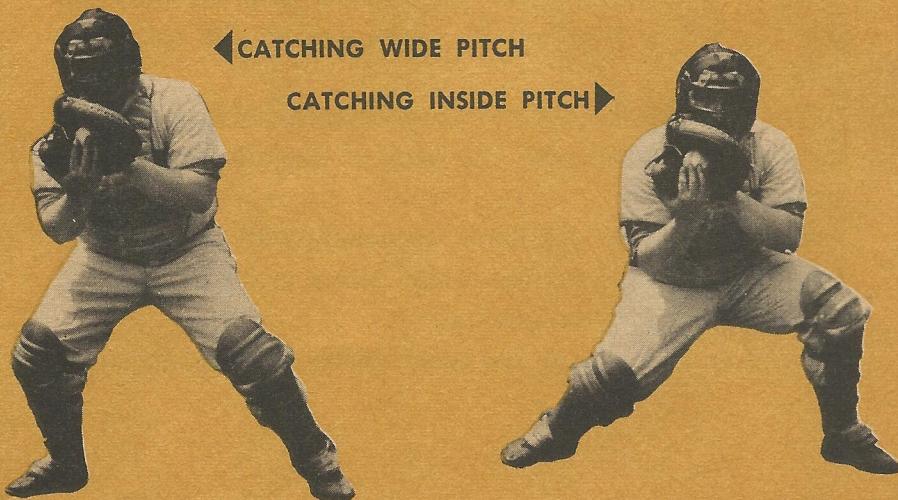
Caution: Don't bother straightening up before throwing and take only one step. Remember, the speed with which you get the throw away is more important than the actual speed of the throw.

■ **Catching the Pop-Up:** As the ball goes up, slide the mask over your head and hold it for an instant until you locate the ball. Then fling it in the opposite direction. This will prevent you from tripping over it while going for a pop-up.

If you have to run for the ball, slide the mask up and let it fall back. Also do this when moving out to field a bunt or covering the plate.

Remember this: Foul flies nearly always drift back toward the infield—the higher the fly, the greater this curve.

◀ CATCHING WIDE PITCH  
CATCHING INSIDE PITCH ▶



So the smart thing to do is to get under the ball so that it will apparently come down on your head — then take one step back for the catch.

On a fly ball back of you, try to position yourself with your back toward the infield to allow for the drift.

The best way of catching the ball is with the glove flat in front of you, enabling you to "look" the ball into the glove.

A right-hand hitter will always foul an outside pitch to your right and an inside pitch to your left. The opposite applies to a lefty hitter. Let that be a guide when running for the ball.

**Caution:** With men on base, keep your head up after catching a foul. Always run the ball back quickly to the infield.

■ **Covering the Plate:** Don't block the plate on tag plays. See where the ball is and make your play accordingly.

If the throw is coming from right field, take a position on the third base side of the plate, a few inches in foul territory.

On throws from left field, set up in fair territory close to the first base side of the plate.

Upon receiving the ball, drop to one or both knees and put the ball in front of the plate, forcing the runner to slide into it.

Try to make the tag with both hands, holding the ball in your right hand with the back of the mitt toward the runner.

On a bad throw or bounce, especially with an important run on base, run up to meet the ball in order to keep the other runner(s) from advancing.

On a double play to the plate, place your right foot on



**TAKING THROW FROM RIGHT FIELD**



**TAKING THROW FROM LEFT FIELD**

the plate and make your play like a first baseman. Make your throw to first on the inside of the diamond to avoid hitting the runner.

Remember on all throws, play the ball first and then the man.

■ **Fielding Grounders:** Field all grounders with both hands. Place your mitt in front of the rolling ball, and scoop it up with the other hand as it goes into the glove.

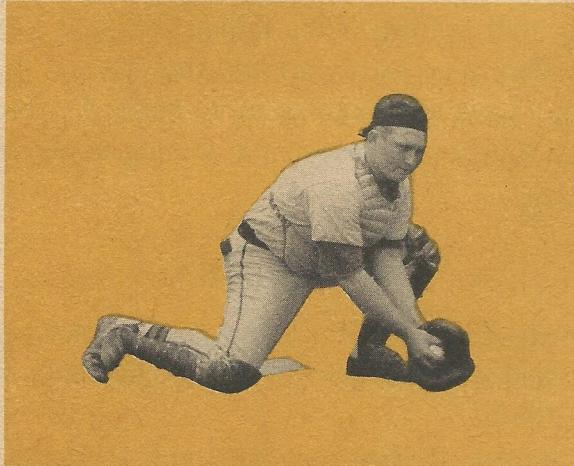
You don't have to straighten up to make the throw. You can throw sidearm or underhand, aiming at the inside of the bag.

#### CATCHING TIPS:

1. When there's a runner on first and the third baseman must field a bunt, continue down the base line and cover third.
2. With runners on first and third and a double steal in order, you can (a) throw to second base, (b) bluff

a throw to second and throw to third, or (c) throw the ball on a low line toward second and have the pitcher cut it off.

3. Never leave the plate with a runner in scoring position.
4. Aim every return throw to the pitcher at his chest and never lob the ball with a man on base, or you'll encourage him to steal.
5. Study the hitter's position in the box and call your pitches accordingly.
6. Never call for a pitch-out if your pitcher's control is poor.
7. On an obvious bunt play, assume a more erect position with the feet closer together. This will help you get a faster jump on the ball.
8. Back up first on every throw by an infielder (except with men on base).
9. If your pitcher is working too fast, slow him down by holding the ball a little longer before returning it, or by delaying your signals.



**MAKING THE TAG**

# 3 BATTING

**T**HE first thing to remember is — *don't be a copy-cat*. If, for example, Mickey Mantle or Hank Aaron is your idol, don't copy his style. What's meat for Mickey or Hank may be poison to you.

Find the form (with suggestions by an expert) that's best suited to your build and strength, then master it. The suggestions that follow may be used by anyone. They offer an easy, natural way of batting. Try them out. Then have your adviser look you over and correct any mistakes.

■ **Selection of Bat:** It's true that a big heavy bat will give the ball a long ride. But who has the strength to control such a bat? Even the big leaguers no longer use these war clubs. They go in for bats which they can easily control, which enables them to come around quickly and meet the ball with full power.

So pick a bat with that thought in mind — one you can easily handle and swing. Try out a few "sticks" and pick the one that feels light and right.

■ **Grip:** You may hold the bat in any one of three ways.

If you're a big, strong fellow or like a light bat, you may use an *end grip*. That is, you may hold the bat with your hands flush against the knob of the handle.

If you're a little fellow, you may *choke up* on the bat — holding it several inches from the end.

The best all-around grip lies somewhere in between. We suggest holding the bat about two inches up the handle. Keep the hands together with the second knuckles of the left hand on line with the third knuckles of the right (right-handed hitters).

Don't grip the bat tightly. A firm grip is best. It keeps the forearm muscles relaxed and helps get the wrists into the swing.

■ **Stance:** Your first concern is a good, comfortable body position. Try to relax physically, yet keep mentally alert.

Take a position in about the middle of the batter's box, close enough to the plate to reach any pitch that cuts the outside corner.

Spread the feet, shoulder-width apart, with the toes on a straight line. Both toes may point toward the plate. But if it feels more comfortable, you may point the front toe between first and second. (Remember now, this refers to righty hitters.)

Don't crouch. Stand up fairly straight. Keep the shoulders and hips level and the weight over the balls of the feet.

Hold the bat back, but not on the shoulder. At the same time, keep your elbows away from the body. But make sure the right elbow is pointing down.

When held correctly, the hands are back opposite the rear shoulder. That helps you come around with a free, full, level swing.

It's all right to wag the bat once or twice while the pitcher is readying to throw. This may help relax your tension and loosen up the swinging muscles. But once the

## CONFIDENCE—COURAGE

KEEP BAT QUIET

DON'T TURN HEAD

KEEP EYES ON BALL

SHOULDERS LEVEL

BE READY  
FOR FAST BALL

PROPER  
GRIP

ARMS AWAY  
FROM BODY

ASSUME  
COMFORTABLE  
POSITION

SHORT STRIDE

10" — 12"

WEIGHT  
DISTRIBUTED

DON'T LIFT

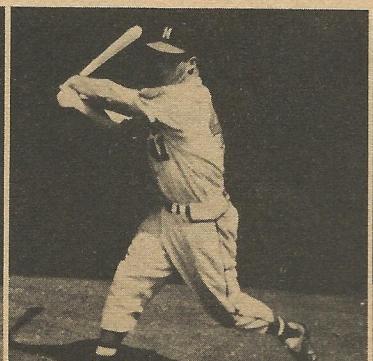
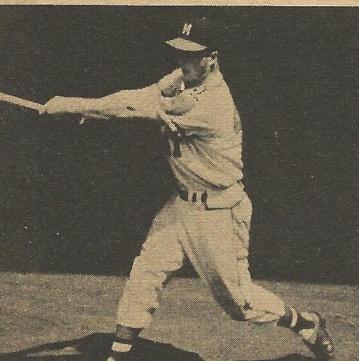
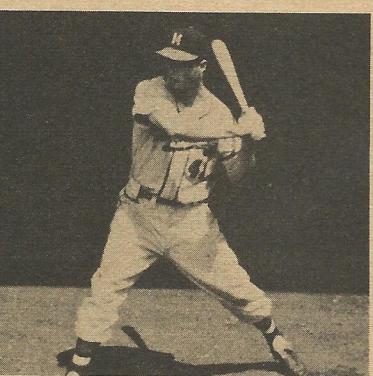
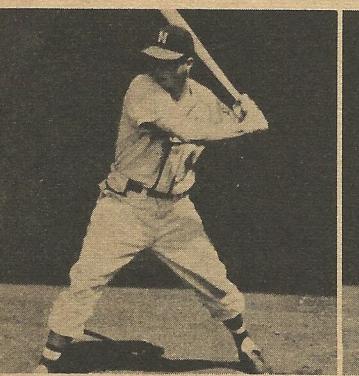
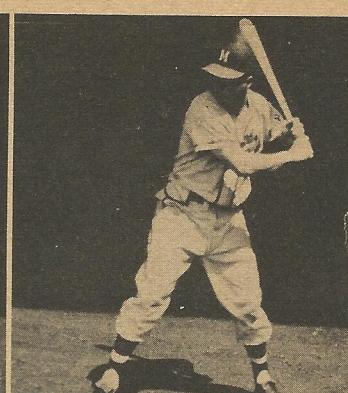
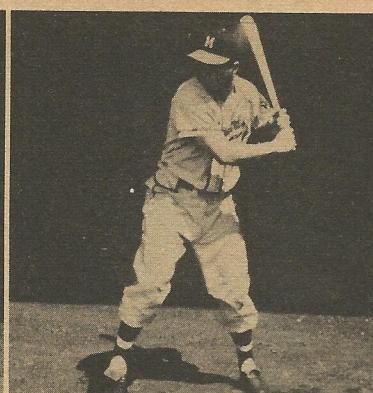
REAR FOOT

HIT BALL IN STRIKE ZONE,  
IN FRONT OF BODY

pitcher brings his arm back, keep the bat steady in hitting position. And don't wiggle or squirm around.

■ **Step:** Just before the ball leaves the pitcher's hand, shift your weight to the back foot and cock the bat a little farther over the shoulder. As the ball is delivered, take a *short, low* step forward toward the pitcher.

That's all there is to the stride. But it's here that many



**TAKE A SHORT, LOW STEP TOWARD THE PITCHER AND WHIP THE BAT AROUND ON A LEVEL PLANE, KEEPING EYES ON BALL FROM START TO BAT CONTACT.**

hitters begin making fatal mistakes. They may (1) lift the foot high off the ground, (2) step back with the rear foot, (3) drop the elbows, (4) step away from the plate, (5) take too big a step, (6) dip the rear shoulder.

■ **Swing:** After the front foot is planted and the ball is released, whip the bat at the ball with a level swing — keeping the hands about letter high.

Pivot your hips into the ball, with the full power of the upper body behind the bat. Hold the front arm straight, keep the hips and shoulders level, and make sure to keep the rear elbow close to the body.

The grip usually tightens as the bat comes through, and the ball should be met slightly in front of the plate with the arms almost in a straight line — the back leg bent and the front leg straight.

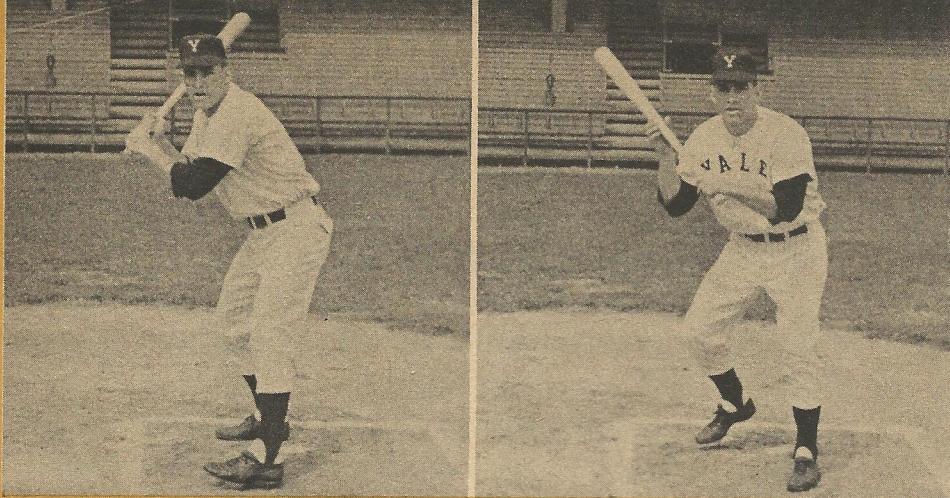
Many batters try to tear the cover off the ball. This is a mistake. Swing hard, of course, but keep control of the bat. A fairly hard swing with good wrist action at the moment of contact will give the ball a good "ride."

After meeting the ball, let the body and bat follow through naturally. Don't cut off the swing. The wrists roll right after contact, with the right wrist coming over the left. This brings the bat to the middle of the back.

Keep this picture in mind: (1) The front shoulder remains facing the pitcher until just before the swing; (2) a hip pivot moves the shoulders; (3) the bat comes around level with the hands about letter-high; (4) the ball is met just in front of the plate; (5) the wrists roll after contact.

Another vital point to remember is: *Keep your head steady.* Let it act as a sort of pivot for the swing. Don't jerk it away from the ball, as many batters unconsciously do.

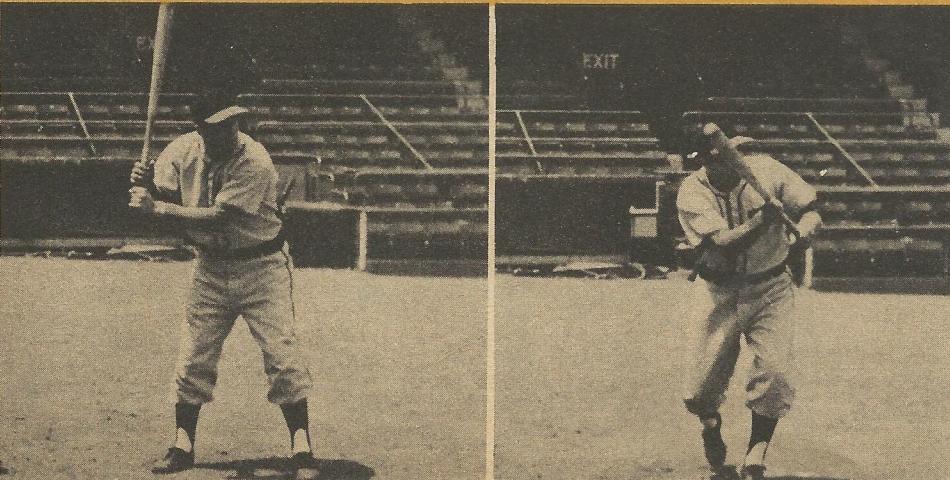
SACRIFICE BUNT

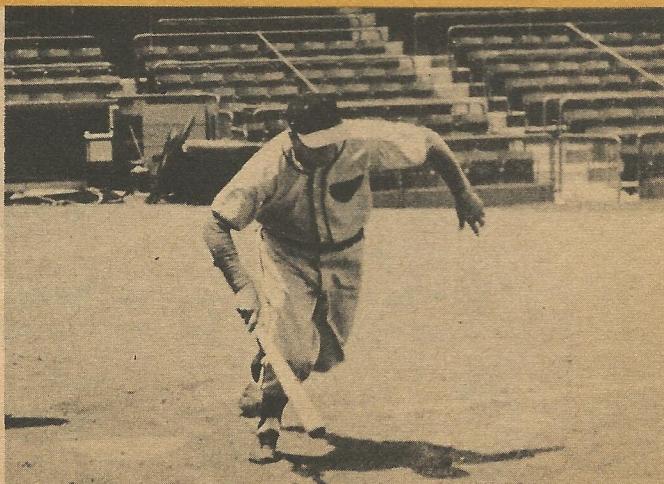
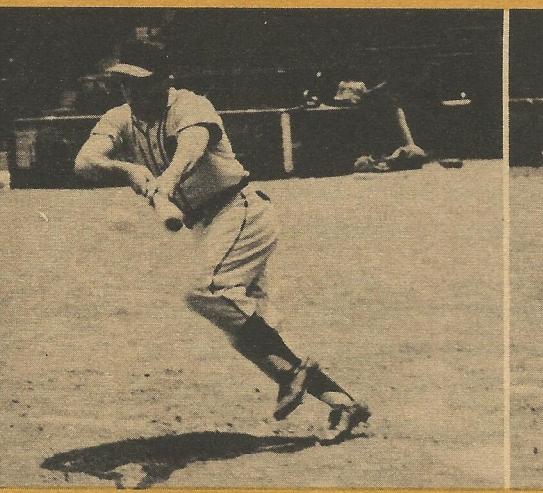


DRAG BUNT



DUMP BUNT





You can't hit what you can't see. So keep your head steady and your eyes on the ball from the time it leaves the pitcher's hand until you hit it.

One more essential point: *Hit with the pitch*. That is, stride with the pitch. Step in to meet an outside ball and step a little back from an inside pitch.

### BATTING TIPS

1. Always be set for a fast ball. That's the pitch that can go right past you if you're not ready. If it's a curve, you still have time to adjust.
2. Swing just a fraction of a second after the stride—not with it. The hands move away from the stride as it's started.
3. Swing at the first good strike when runners are in scoring position (except when the count is three and nothing).
4. Take a first strike whenever the opponents are more than three runs ahead or when the pitcher is having trouble with his control. This forces the pitcher to make extra pitches, and may cause him to tire later in the game.
5. When the infield is playing in, just try to meet the ball rather than kill it.
6. With no one on base and two out, definitely go for distance. In short, try to reach a base where one hit rather than two will be needed to score you.
7. When awaiting your turn at bat, stand as close to the batter's box as possible to get the timing of the pitches.
8. When on deck, help any runner trying to score. Pick up any bats in the way and yell or signal "slide" or

“stay up”, whichever fits the situation.

9. If your stride is too long, widen your stance and put a little more weight on your rear foot.
10. If you have a “hitch” in your swing, hold the bat against the outer part of the shoulder and raise the rear elbow.
11. If you “chop”, raise the front shoulder and put more weight on the rear foot.
12. If a curve is your weakness, try to follow the ball to the bat and hit to the opposite field.

## BUNTING

**Sacrifice Bunt:** Take your regular stance in the batter's box. Hold this position until the pitcher starts his delivery. Then step forward with the rear foot so that the feet are almost squared away.

While pivoting, slide the upper hand into a position close to the trademark. Grip the bat very lightly with this hand, keeping the fingers underneath and the thumb on top. This hand merely grips the bat for balance. The lower hand controls the bat, angling it in the direction you want to place the ball.

Bend the upper body and the knees (slightly), keeping the weight on the balls of the feet.

Important point: *Hold the bat at the top of your strike zone* (armpits), keeping it parallel to the ground with the arms relaxed out in front of the body.

Since the bat is at the top of your strike zone, any pitch above it will be a ball. So never swing at it. If the pitch comes below the bat (but not under the knees), lower the body from the waist and knees and let the ball hit the bat.

Move your arms as little as possible. And, just as in catching a ball, let the hands and arms "give" as the ball is met. In other words, let the ball do the work.

■ **Bunting for a Hit:** Righties can either push the ball toward first or dump it down the third-base line. You should actually be running by the time the bat meets the ball.

The push is a smart play when the first baseman is playing deep. The idea is to push the ball to the pitcher's left, past him — making the first or second basemen field the ball.

Grasp the bat a little tighter than for the sacrifice, dropping the right foot back and shifting the right hand about a third of the way up the bat. Extend the arms forward to meet the ball, angling the bat in the direction you want to bunt it.

At the same time, lean the body forward and take a step in the direction of the bunt.

Lefties have an advantage in dragging the ball down the first base line, since they're a step nearer the bag. Pivot on the right foot and cross the left leg over the right. Slide the left hand about a third of the way up the bat and let the fat end make contact.

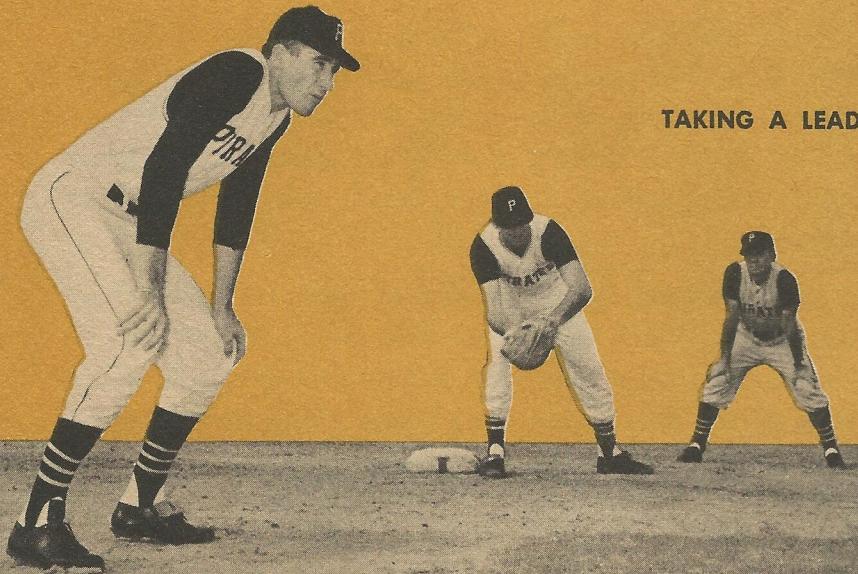
Remember, conceal your intent to bunt until the last instant and meet the ball on the move.

# 4

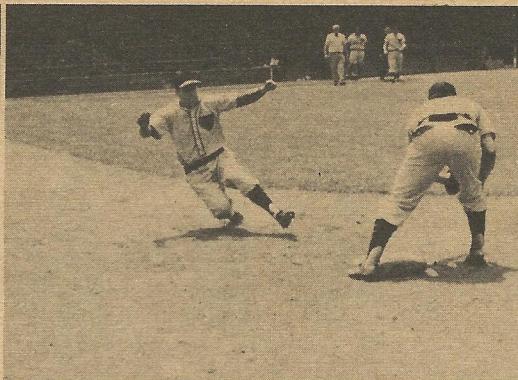
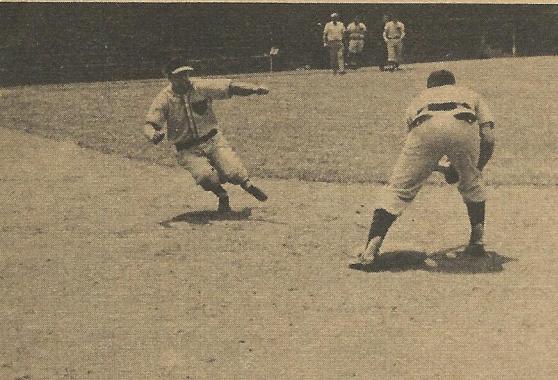
# BASE RUNNING

**S**PEED is a great asset, but quick-thinking and sliding are equally important. After hitting the ball, complete your swing, untrack yourself, and head for first — whether the ball has been popped up, grounded to the infield, or lined to the outfield.

No matter what side of the plate you swing from, try to take your first step with the rear foot. That gives you a longer first step.



TAKING A LEAD



## HOOK SLIDE

■ **Form:** Don't run with your head down. Keep it up so that you can see the play, and pump your arms back and forth rather than across the chest. Run on your toes — like a sprinter.

If you're trying to beat out a hit to the infield, run as fast and as straight as you can right over the bag (don't jump at it). As you pass it and the umpire calls you safe, be on the alert for a wild throw or an error which may permit you to advance. Don't just keep running into right field.

If the ball goes to the outfield, be prepared to take an extra base. The way to do this is by cutting by the inside corner — stepping on the corner with either foot.

The important thing is to run at full speed and not break stride. After making the turn, decide whether or not to advance.

■ **Taking a Lead:** Don't take a lead until you know where the ball is. Watch for the old hidden-ball trick. Listen to your coach. Stand with your left foot touching the inside edge of the bag, facing the pitcher. Don't make a move until the pitcher gets on the rubber.



The type of lead depends upon the situation. If you're not going to steal, take a one-way lead. Four steps are ideal — two steps and the distance of a slide back.

Bend your knees and keep low, with the hands outstretched and lean slightly toward first.

If you intend stealing second, take a *two-way* lead. This may be a bit shorter than the one-way lead. But your weight must be balanced over both feet — ready to go in either direction depending on the pitcher's move.

Watch the pitcher's knee action to see what he's going to do. If he delivers to the plate, pivot on your right foot, swing your left leg over the right in a cross-step, and push off with your right foot. A short left-handed jab action will help you get squared away toward second quickly.

■ **Lead Off Second:** A big lead isn't really necessary. You can get 15 to 20 feet on the pitcher's motion alone when going to third. With less than two out, make sure any ball hit in front of you goes through to the outfield before advancing. That is, unless you're forced by a runner on first. Then you must run on any grounder.

■ **Lead Off Third:** Take your lead in foul territory so you

won't be hit by a fair ball. On any throw to third by the catcher, return in fair territory to bother the third baseman's vision.

When tagging up on a fly ball, shift your weight to the front foot and look at home. As soon as the coach yells "Go!", step with the rear foot and tear for the plate.

If it's a short fly on which you cannot score, fake a dash home to get the outfielder to throw the ball. A poor throw may permit you to score.

■ **Sliding:** There are three good ways to slide. But the main thing to remember is never change your mind at the last minute. That leads to injuries. Another thing: Don't jump into a slide.

■ **Hook Slide:** Let's assume you're sliding to the left (action is reversed when sliding to the right). Take off from the right foot and extend both legs, keeping them slightly bent.

Take most of the shock on your left hip, and make sure both feet are several inches above the ground to avoid catching your heel spikes in the ground.

Don't go into your hook immediately. Keep the left leg

#### BENT LEG SLIDE



in a slightly bent position throughout the slide with the foot several inches off the ground. Bend the right leg to a greater degree, with the right foot pointed so that the top part of the toes will contact the base.

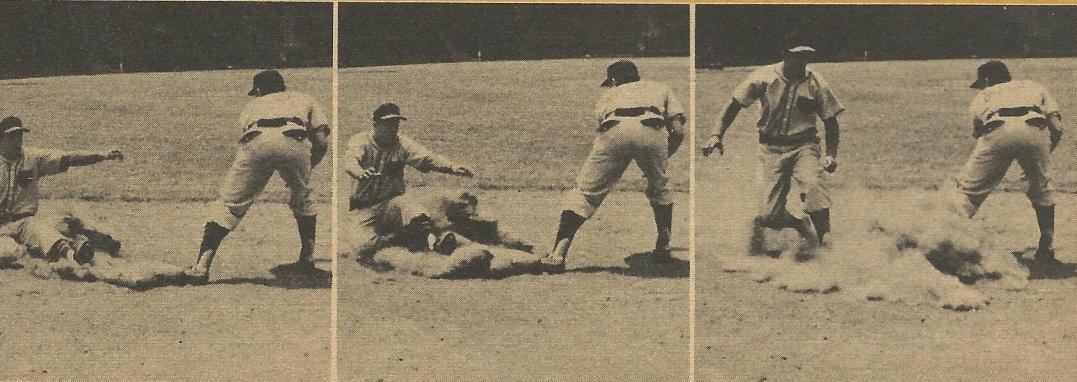
As contact is made, your momentum will carry you past the base and you'll finish with your foot hooked to the base.

As you go into your slide, raise the elbows off the ground and bend your arms, keeping the fingers cupped. Also stretch your neck slightly forward so that you can watch your target — the base.

■ **Bent Leg:** Take off from either foot. Land on your left hip and bend the left leg under you. Keep the right foot in the air and slide on your left hip and leg.

If you have time, you may come into the bag with the rear (left) foot. If you want to get up quickly, hit the bag with your front (right) foot and push up with the other leg. Your momentum will quickly bring you up into a standing position.

Keep the body straighter and the weight more forward than in the hook slide, watching the bag with your eyes.



This slide enables you to come to your feet after a straight-in slide and continue on without stopping.

■ **Feet-First Slide:** This is simply a straight-in slide used to get back to a bag on a pick-off play. Make sure to keep the spikes off the ground, and slide on your backside, keeping the arms off the ground and the head slightly arched forward.

■ **Run-Down Play:** If the defense has you trapped, try to delay the tag as long as possible. The more throws they must make, the greater is the chance for error. Meanwhile, you'll give any other runners on base a chance to advance.

This is especially true whenever you're hung up between third and home. Hold out as long as you can, so that the other runners can advance as far as possible—even to third. They must assume that you'll be tagged out.

### BASE RUNNING TIPS

1. A runner on second base moving toward third on a single should watch the third-base coach for a signal.
2. When picked off first by a wide margin, light out quickly for second. You may catch both the first and second baseman napping.
3. Always watch the runner ahead of you.
4. When rounding a base, touch the inside corner without breaking stride. Use either foot, though the left is preferred.
5. If the throw is coming from behind you, watch the baseman's hands and slide to the opposite side.
6. If you're on first and the batter hits a ground ball to the second baseman, avoid running into a tag.

Make him chase you—delaying the play.

7. If you're on third with another runner on first, try to score on a ground ball. If the throw is to home and you're definitely too late, pull up and get caught in a run-down—enabling the other runners to advance to second and third. In short, prevent a double play and try to let the other runners advance to scoring position.
8. If you're on third with one out, try to score on a ground ball. It's worth the gamble.
9. If another runner is coming behind you after scoring, turn around and coach him—telling him whether to slide, and picking up any loose bat or mask that might injure him.
10. Practice sliding on both sides and with either leg.
11. Keep studying the defense. Find out who can throw and who cannot, which of them are sure-handed and which are not. Never forget the inning, score, outs, count on the batter, speed of the other runners on base. All of these facts affect your base-running.
12. Whenever you're in doubt about a signal, always step on the base, call time, and check with a coach.

## INFIELDING STANCE



# 5

# PLAYING THE INFIELD

**K**EEP your mind 100% on the play. *Before* the ball is pitched, figure out exactly what you'll do if it's hit to you.

Keep studying the batters to learn how to play them, and always be aware of the score, inning, outs, and speed of the runners. This will help you decide the correct play.

■ **Stance:** Set up in a semi-crouch with the legs spread about shoulder-width apart, knees bent slightly, and hands in front of the knees.

Train your eyes on the batter. As the ball is pitched, shift your weight to the balls of the feet and lean in. Keep low and on balance, ready to move in any direction.

■ **Fielding:** If the ball is hit to you, watch it closely. Size

up its roll and, if possible, move in and field it at the top of a bounce.

If the ball is hit to your left, pivot on the left foot and cross your right foot over. On balls hit to your right, pivot on the right foot and cross the left foot over. This gives you a big first step.

You'll be able to field most balls out in front with the feet in stride position. The idea is to keep low — it's easier to come up for a ball than to go down for it.

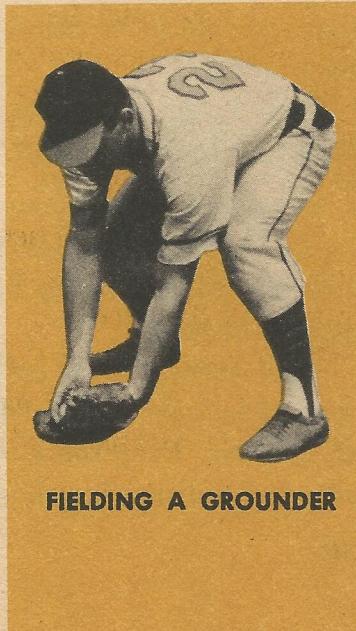
Bend the knees and hips and lower the glove so that its back touches the body. Keep the palms out and the fingers down.

Field the ball out in *front* with the elbows and hands away from the body. Field the ball with both hands whenever possible.

On hard hit balls, it's smart to place the heels together and field the ball where the heels meet. Even if you don't field the ball cleanly, the heels will prevent the ball from rolling through to the outfield.

■ **Throwing:** It isn't necessary to take a couple of steps or skips before throwing. You should be able to throw hard with just one step.

If you have time, straighten up. Take a step toward first and throw with an overhand motion. If you must hurry, come up only part way and throw with more of a sidearm motion. With practice and experience, you'll learn how to



**FIELDING A GROUNDER**



## **FIELDING AND THROWING ACTION**

throw from a crouch — sidearm or even underhand.

On a long throw, plant your right foot (righty) so that you can get a full throwing motion and thus greater force.

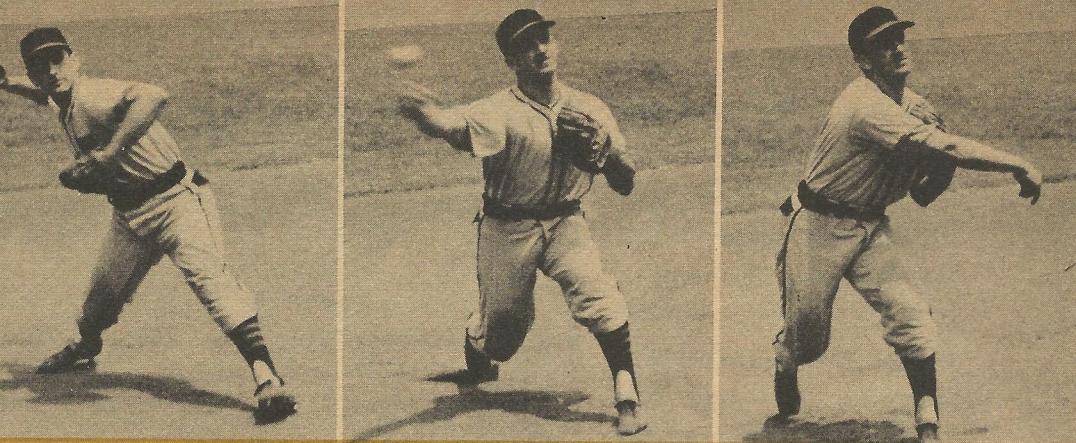
If you're throwing for a force-out, aim above the baseman's belt. If it's a tag play, aim below the baseman's belt.

With two out, never make a long throw if a short one will do. Example: Man on first and ball is hit to second or third baseman. If the runner hasn't had a big jump, the throw should go to second for the easy force-out — rather than to first.

With a man on third and less than two out, "look him back" to third before throwing to first.

**Tagging:** When a runner must be tagged, sprint quickly to your base and straddle it. Place your feet on either side, with the weight evenly balanced so that you can shift in either direction.

Upon receiving the ball, drop your gloved hand to the ground in front of the base and pull your bare hand out of the way. Keep the glove arm slightly bent to take the shock of the runner's slide.



The idea is to let the runner tag himself out by sliding into the ball. Don't leave the base and go after him or stab at him. Just look at his legs to see which way he's sliding.

■ **Run-Down Play:** Whenever a runner is trapped off base, always run him back to the base from which he came. Don't throw needlessly. One or two throws are all it takes.

Fake a throw with a full throwing motion, not just a wrist flick. Somewhere along the line the runner will try to reverse himself — and run right into your tag.

Whenever a runner stops between bases in confusion, *don't throw* the ball. *Run* straight at him, forcing him to go one way or the other. Then you've got him.

Warning: If this happens with another runner at an advanced base, say third, keep an eye on the advanced runner. If he strays far enough off his bag, you can suddenly wheel and maybe catch him between the bases.

### **FIRST BASE**

On throws to first, quickly sprint to a position in front of the face and face the teammate making the throw. Spread

your feet about the width of the bag, with the toe of your pivot foot (right for righties, left for lefties) just touching the bag.

If the throw is directly to you, step forward with your left foot and take the throw. (Remember, this is for right-handers.)

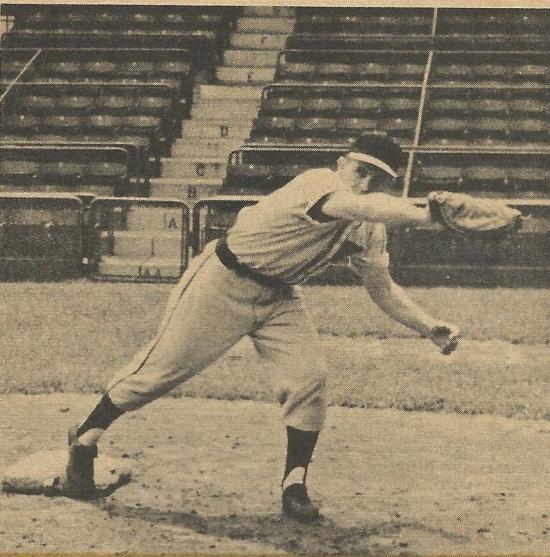
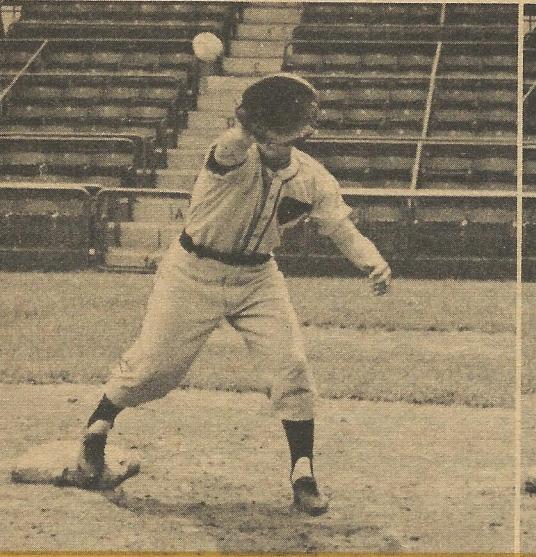
If the throw is to the right, place the left toe against the second base side of the bag and stretch with your right foot.

If the throw is to the left, keep the right toe on the bag and stretch with the other foot.

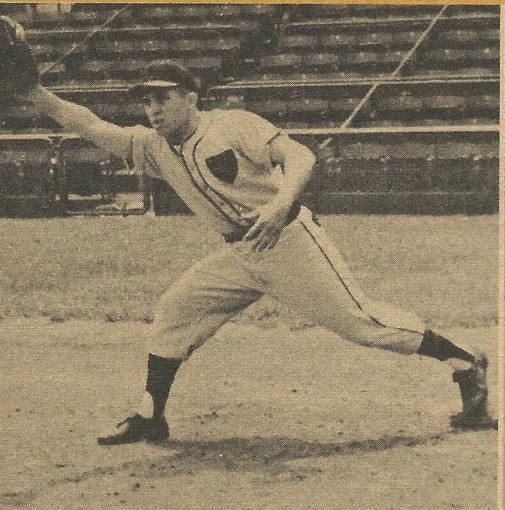
If the throw is too wide for a simple shift, a cross-step and backhand catch is necessary. Let's say the throw is wide to righty first baseman's right. Keeping the right toe on the bag, cross your left foot over and back-hand the ball with the glove. This type of action gives you the most stretch.

If the throw cannot be





**STRETCH LEFT**



**STRETCH RIGHT**



## HOLDING A MAN ON

reached while remaining on the bag, don't stay there. Get off the bag quickly and make the catch. If the throw is to the inside, you can try tagging the runner with a sweeping motion of the glove.

When taking a throw from the catcher or pitcher fielding a bunt or slow roller, contact the bag with the left foot and step to the inside of the diamond with the right. The throw thus won't hit the runner.

■ **Holding a Man On:** Take a position on the home plate side of the bag. Place your left foot near the foul line and the right foot alongside the corner nearest the pitcher. Take a crouch position with your weight over the balls of the feet and the glove in front of the body.

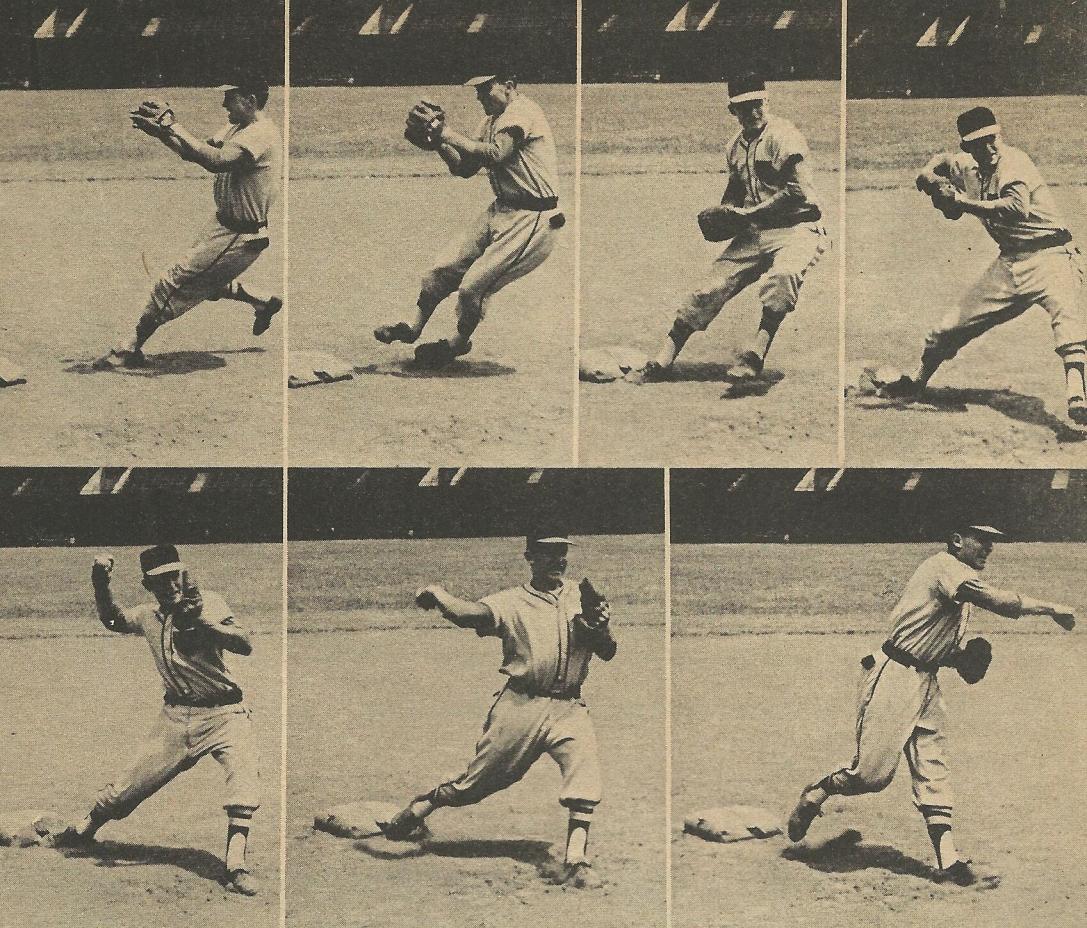
On throws from the pitcher, just drop your glove in front of the base. The runner will tag himself out. Don't stab at his chest.

The moment the pitcher delivers to the batter, hustle away from the bag. Take two steps toward second, starting with the left foot, and face the batter.

## DOUBLE-PLAY

There's nothing like a double-play to pull your defense out of a tough spot. So have your shortstop-second baseman combination practice, practice, and practice some more on it.

The most important thing to remember is to make sure of the first out. Too many players are so eager to get the

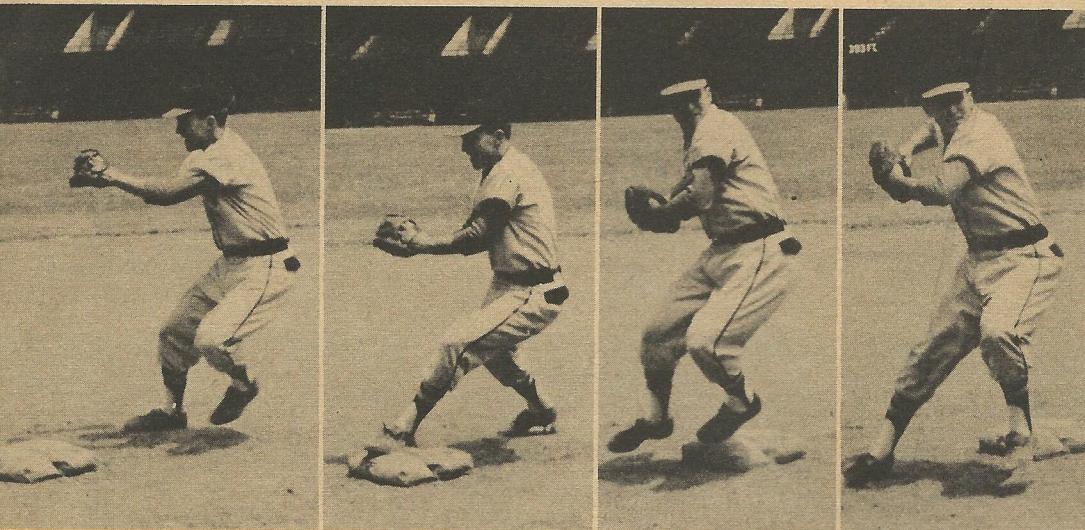


#### **SECOND BASEMAN PIVOTING INTO BASELINE**

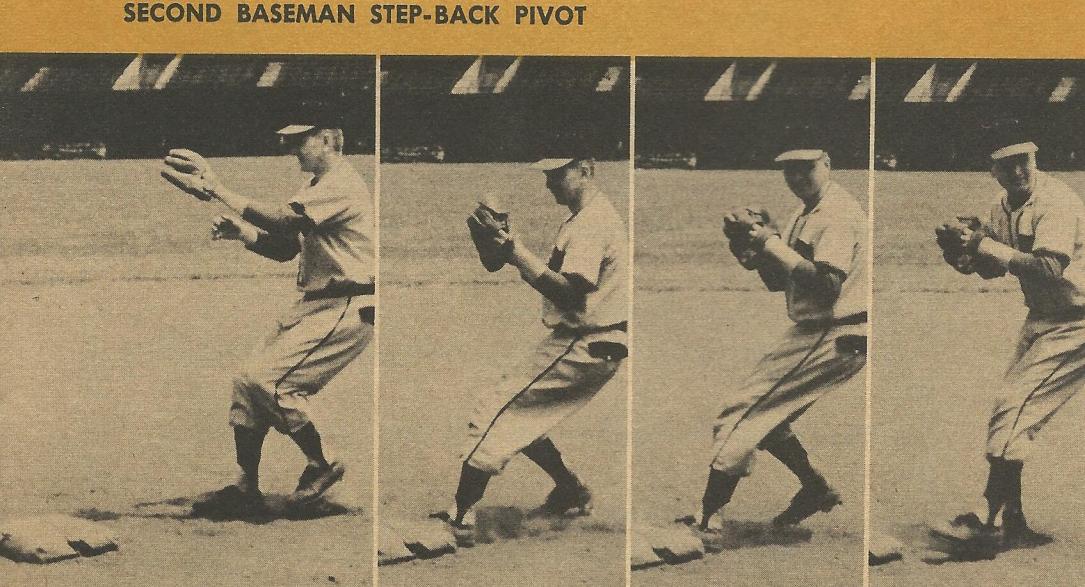
second man that they mess up the first out — and wind up with no out at all.

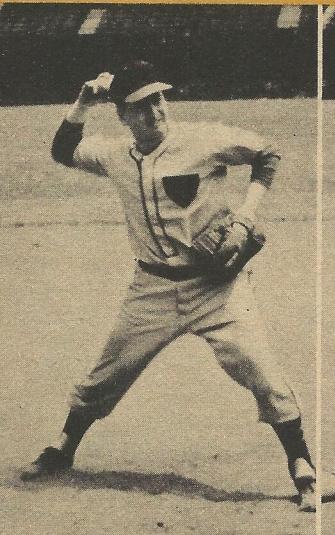
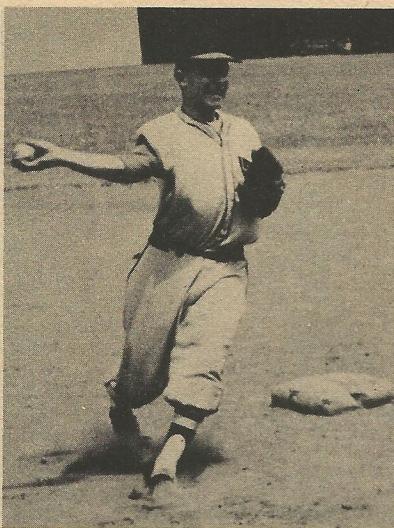
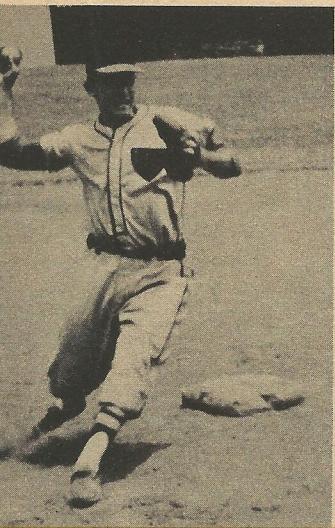
The main faults to avoid are:

1. Trying to throw to the pivot man before getting the ball.
2. Getting to the bag too late and thus not being under control.
3. Rushing the throw and thus throwing wild.
4. Throwing to first when there's no chance of getting the second out.



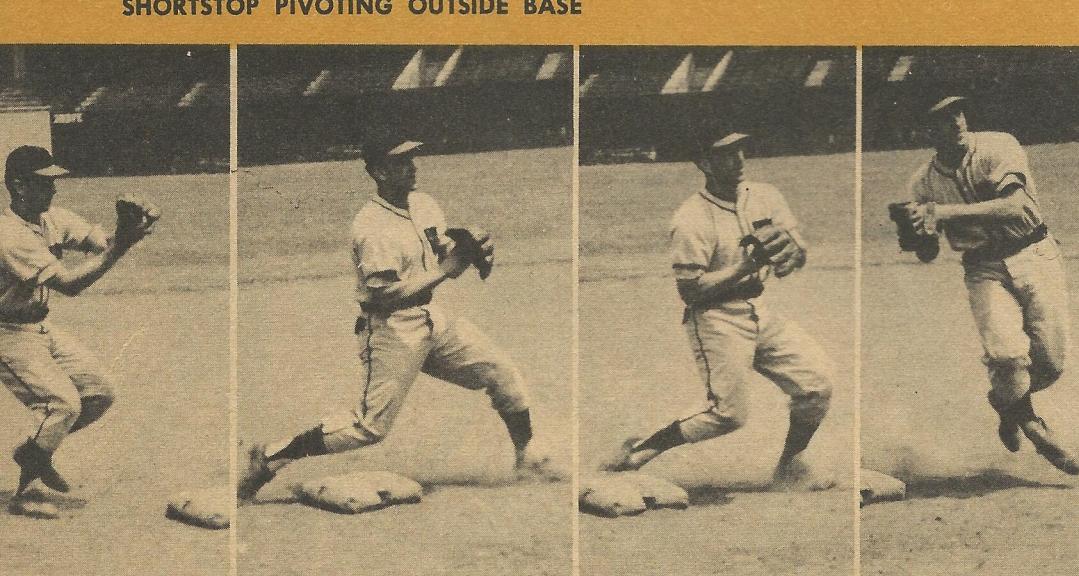
**SECOND BASEMAN PIVOTING INSIDE DIAMOND**

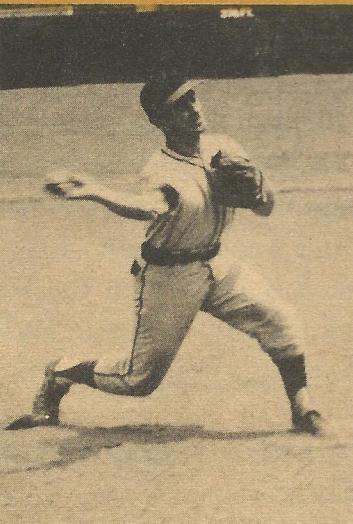
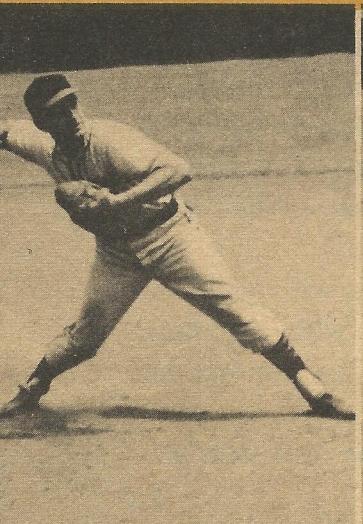
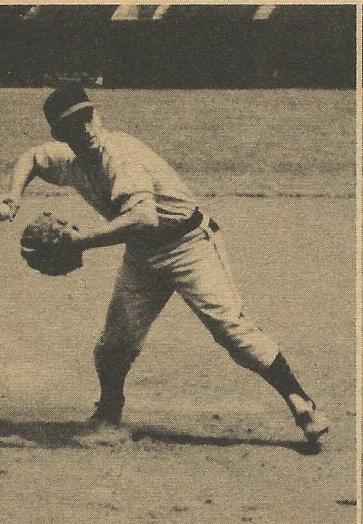






**SHORTSTOP PIVOTING INSIDE BASE**





■ **Feed Throw:** If you're only a step or two from the bag when you field the ball, don't throw it to the pivot man. Step on the bag yourself.

If you're moving toward the bag and are fairly close to it, you may feed the ball underhand with two hands or, better yet, one. Pull the glove hand away from the ball to give the pivot man a clear view of it, and feed the ball about chin high to him.

■ **Pivot Footwork:** There are at least a half dozen ways of making the pivot for a double-play. Most of them however, are a bit tough for young players. We'll give you several good moves, then let you work the others out as you move up the baseball ladder.

The first duty of the pivot man, whether he's the short-stop or the second baseman, is to come into the bag at an angle so that he's squarely facing the thrower, being on a line with him if possible.

■ **Second Baseman:** Perhaps the easiest type of pivot is to step on the base with the right foot as you catch the ball, then step toward first with the left foot for the throw.

This is a very simple, effective pivot whenever you have lots of time and the runner isn't bothering you. But, since you're stepping into the base-path, the runner—if he's close—can slide into your stepping (left) foot.

A second method is to step on the bag with your left foot, then push off the bag—stepping back with your right foot and then stepping toward first with the left foot for the throw.

This brings you back and away from the base-line, giving you a clear throw.

Method No. 3 is to hit the bag with your left foot as you

catch the ball, step into the diamond with your right foot, then step toward first with the left for the throw.

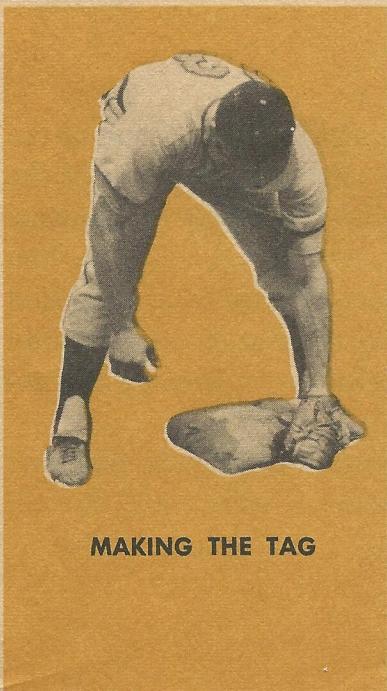
As you can see, this brings you inside the base-line, out of the runner's way.

■ **Shortstop Pivots:** As you catch the ball, step over the bag with the left foot. Then hop and drag your right foot against the corner of the bag, and step toward first with the left foot for the throw.

Method No. 2 is to come down on the bag with your left foot as you catch the ball, step to the inside of the diamond with your right foot, and then step toward first with the left foot for the throw.

### THIRD-BASE HINTS

1. Take any ball to your left which you can reach, as you have a shorter throw than the short-stop.
2. With two out, guard the base-line to prevent an extra-base hit.



MAKING THE TAG

3. Start toward the plate whenever the batter drops his bat for a bunt.

4. Try fielding a slow grounder on the run and off your left foot with your gloved hand. Make the throw while straightening up.

5. With runners on first and second, go for the double play by way of second — unless the ball is hit directly over the bag. Then step on the bag and throw to first.



CATCHING A HIGH FLY

# 6

# PLAYING THE OUTFIELD

**U**pon going to your position, check the direction of the wind. The wind has a definite effect on the carry of the ball, and you should always know which way it's blowing.

Now study the hitter at bat, so that you can play him correctly. Also check the runners on base for speed. And mentally check the inning, score, number of outs, distance to the fences, and everything else that makes up the situation.

All of these factors are important in position play and throwing. Before every pitch, think of what you'll do with the ball if it's hit to you.

■ **Stance:** Upon reaching your position, assume a good ready position. This is a semi-crouch with the hands on the knees or bent in front of you, and the feet comfortably spread on line with each other.

Watch the batter as the ball is delivered. Lean forward on the balls of your feet. You're now ready to move in any direction.

After the pitch (if the ball isn't swung at), you can straighten up and relax. But once the pitcher steps on the rubber, go into your ready position.

■ **Moving for the Ball:** If the ball is hit to your right, pivot on your right foot, bring the left foot across, and drive off your right foot for the ball. This gives you the greatest distance on your first step.

If the ball is hit to your left, pivot on your left foot, bring your right leg across, and drive off your left foot.

If the ball is hit in back of you, turn your back and hustle for it in the fastest manner possible — watching the ball over your shoulder. With practice, you'll learn to turn your back on the ball and run to a spot where you think it'll fall — shooting one or two swift glances over your shoulder to check the ball's flight.

While moving for the ball, run on your toes—not the heels—and swing your arms in normal fashion—don't keep them at the sides. Many young fielders make the mistake of backing

#### CATCHING A LOW LINER



up for the ball and then stabbing at it at the last instant.

■ **Catching a Fly:** Try to make the catch while facing the ball in stride position. If you're right-handed, keep the left foot forward. If you're a lefty, keep the right foot forward. This helps you get the throw away quicker.

If you're catching the ball above face level, keep the back of the glove turned toward you and the thumbs together.

If you're catching the ball below face level, you may hold the glove out with the palm turned up and little fingers together.

Low line drives should be caught with the fingers turned down, palm turned toward the ball, and little fingers together.

■ **Grounders:** If no one is on base, you may play the ball safely. You can drop one knee to the ground—right knee for righties and left knee for lefties. This enables you to block the ball and still make a fairly fast return to the infield.

Never drop both knees to the ground. This delays the throw too long and holds you up if the ball bounces away from you.

With men on base, you must field grounders much in the manner of an infielder.

■ **Throwing:** With men on base, never hold on to the ball after fielding it. Get it to the right base immediately.

Never take three or four running steps before throwing. Get your legs in position while moving for the ball.

Take a single hop-step with the pivot foot (right for righties), then stride out with the opposite foot. Or, if it's easier, take a short step with the front foot, bring

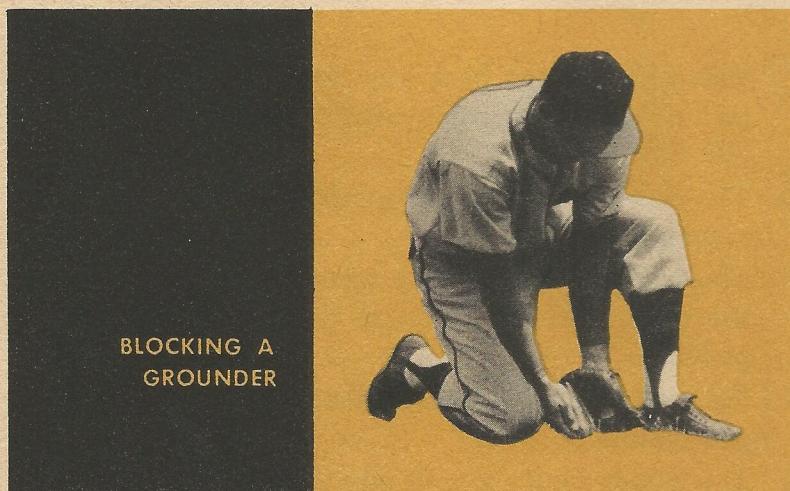
up the rear foot, and then step out with the front foot for the throw.

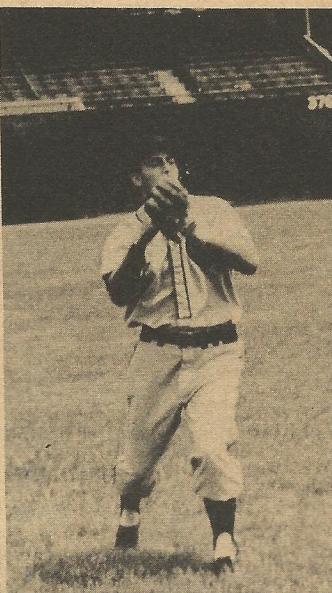
Unless the throw is a short one, line the ball on one hop to the base. If throwing to a relay man, aim at his head. This enables him to catch and throw in one motion.

Throw the ball with an overhand motion—the fastest and most accurate way of throwing.

### OUTFIELDING TIPS

1. Don't let the sun blind you out of a catch. Raise your gloved hand to blot it out, then as the ball drops make the catch.
2. If a long throw is needed on a fly ball, run two or three extra steps back, wait for the ball, and then make the catch while moving in. This gives you extra force for the throw.
3. With a lefty at bat, the left fielder moves in and to his left. With a righty at bat, the right fielder moves in and to his right.





#### MAKING THE CATCH AND THROWING

4. The right fielder backs up first on all bunts and pick-offs. He backs up second on all throws from the left side.
5. The center fielder backs up second on all bunts and plays at the bag.
6. The left fielder backs up second on all plays from the right side. He backs up third on all bunts and pick-offs.
7. Take all fly balls which either you or an infielder can handle.
8. The center fielder should take any ball he can reach.



9. If you and another fielder are going for a ball and you think you can reach it easier, yell "I got it!" If you think he's in better position, yell "You take it!"
10. If a runner on third represents the winning or tying run late in the game, don't catch any long foul fly with less than two out. The runner can score after the catch.

# 7

# TEAM DEFENSE

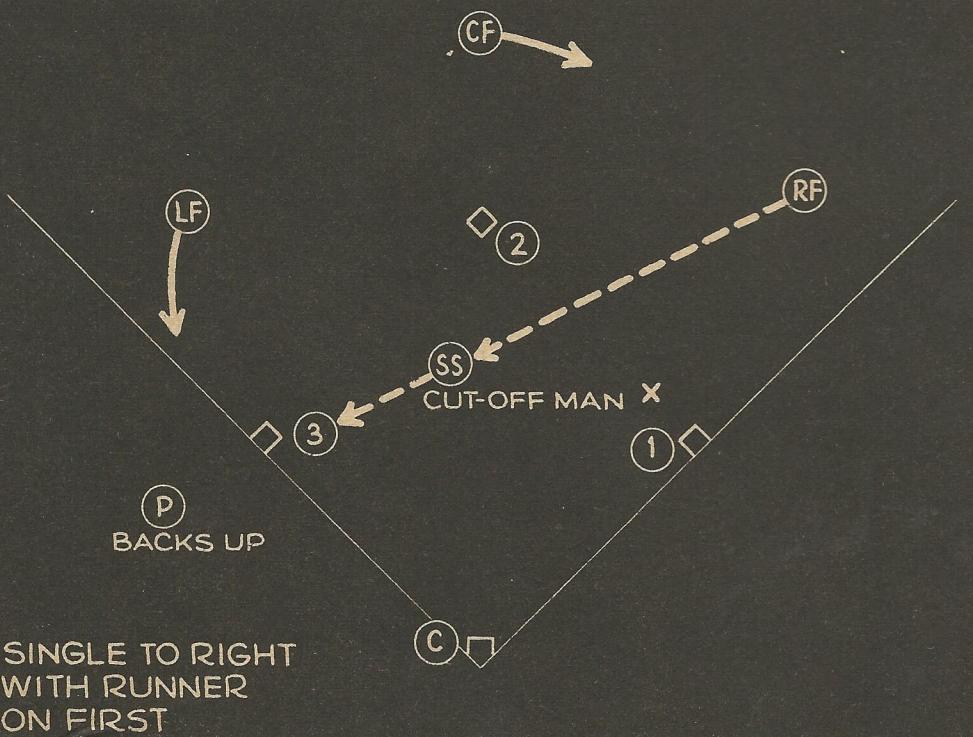
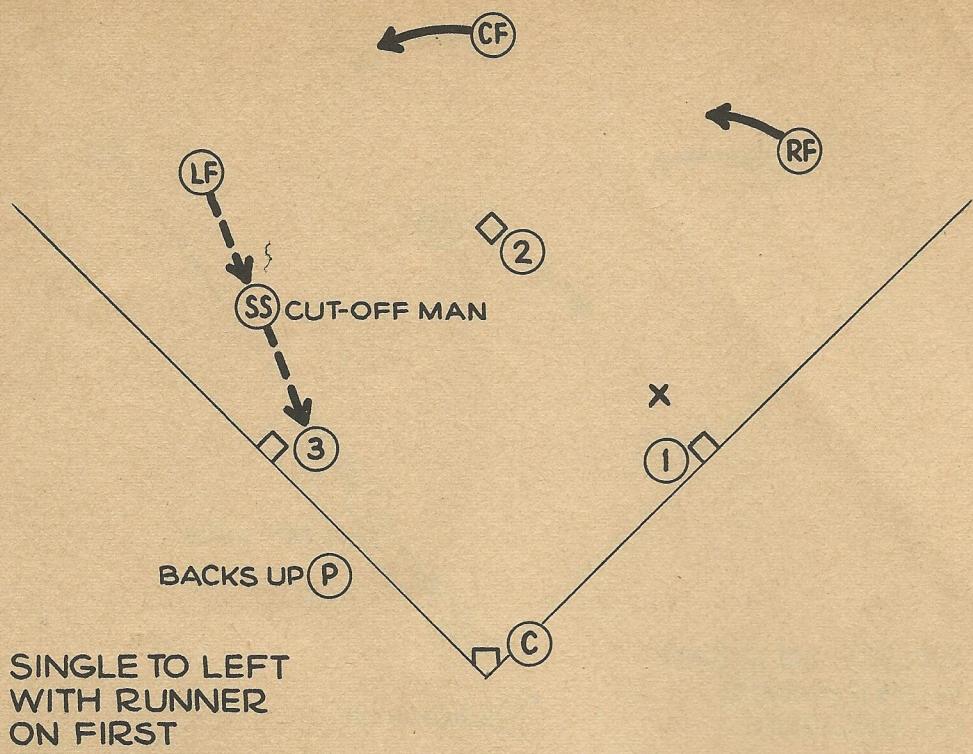
**N**EXT time you go to a ball game, forget about watching the ball as it's bunted in a sacrifice situation or socked to the outfield.

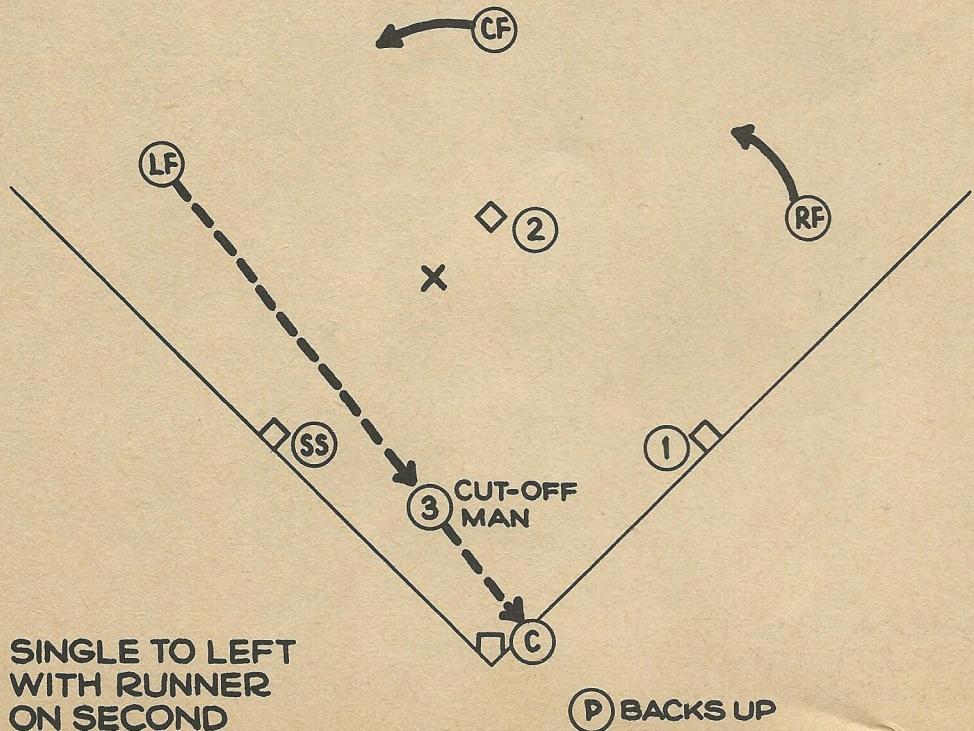
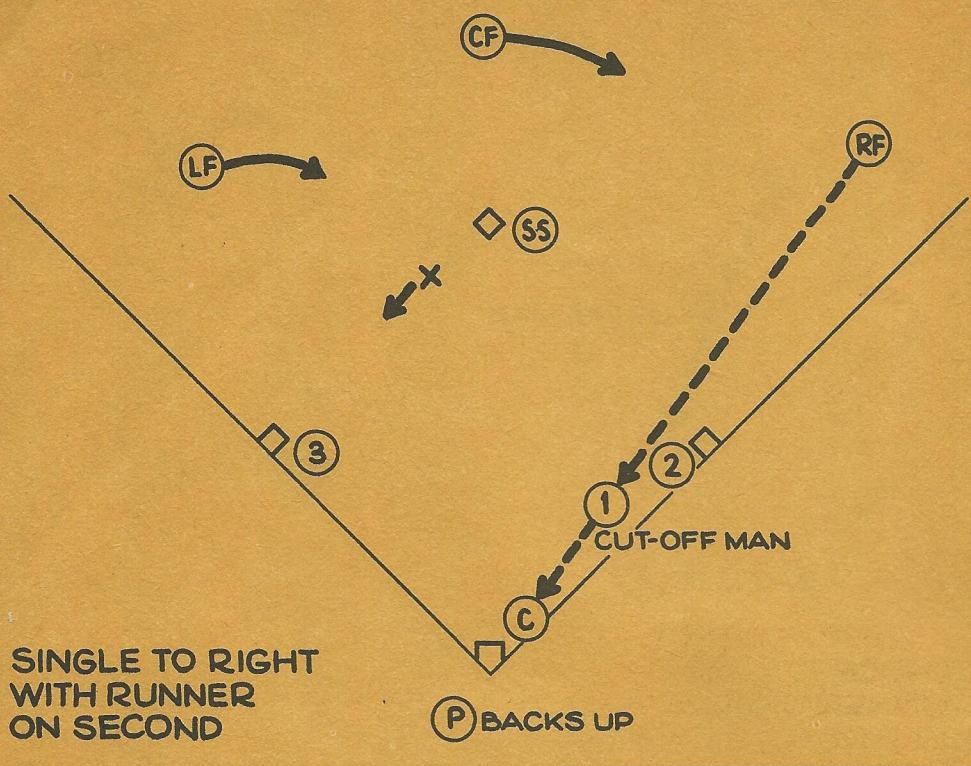
Watch the team in the field. See how the nine players react to the situation. Watch the relay man rush out to take the throw from an outfielder—while the infield wheels into proper position. Watch the cut-off man take his position and hear the catcher shout directions to him (whether to let the ball through or to cut it off and throw it to a base to get the back runner trying to advance).

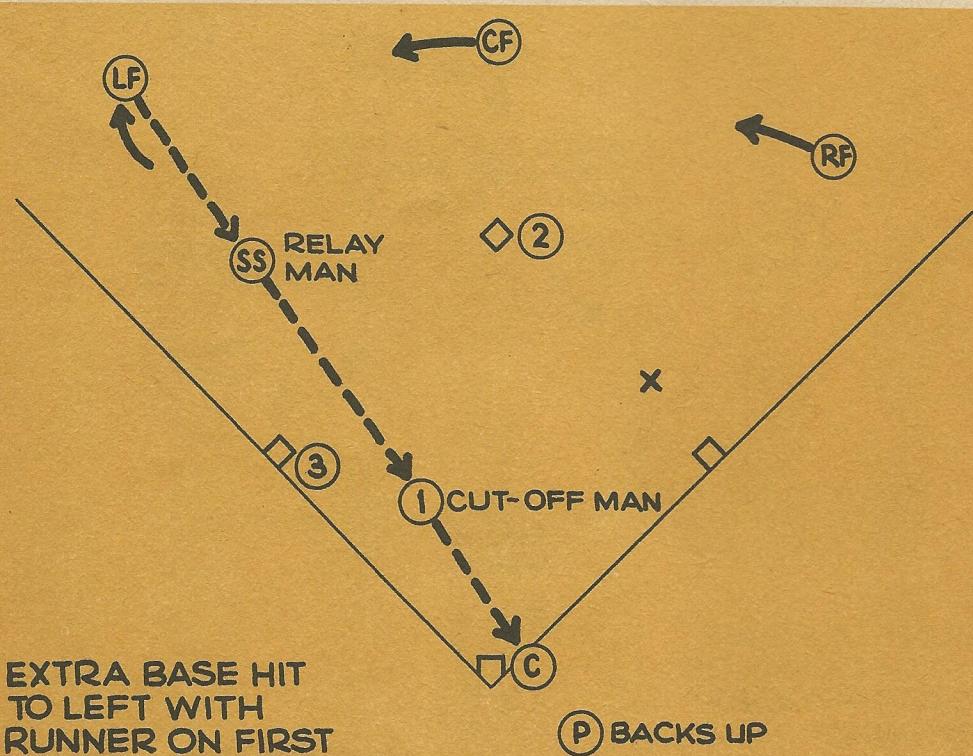
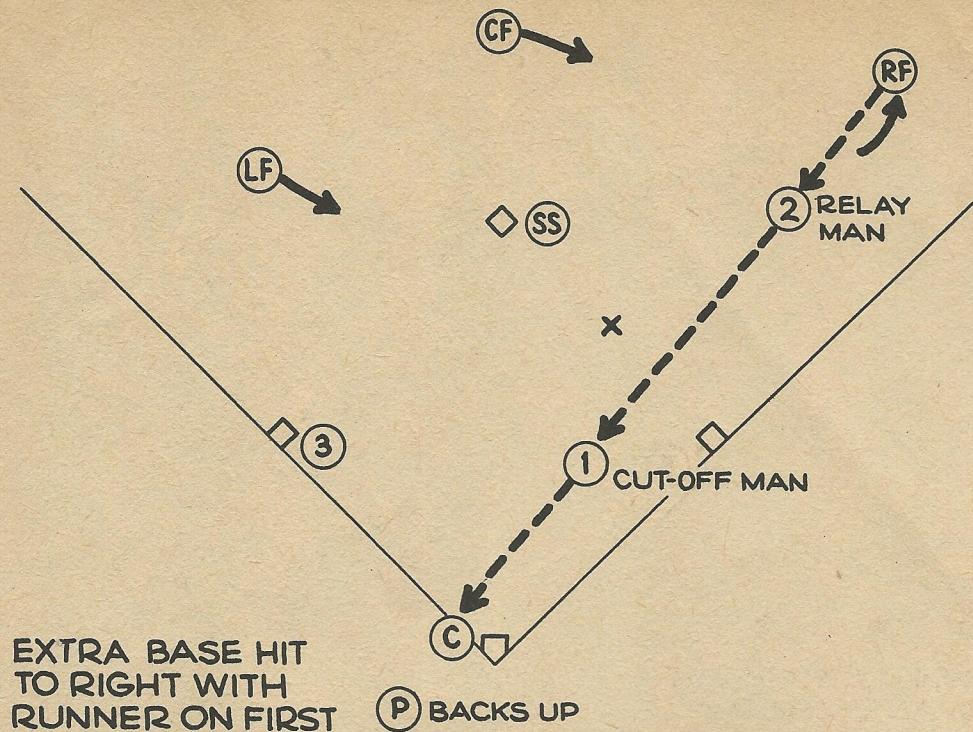
This is team play at its best. And it's essential. You never can afford to give the offense an extra base. It may mean a run—the run that costs you the ball game.

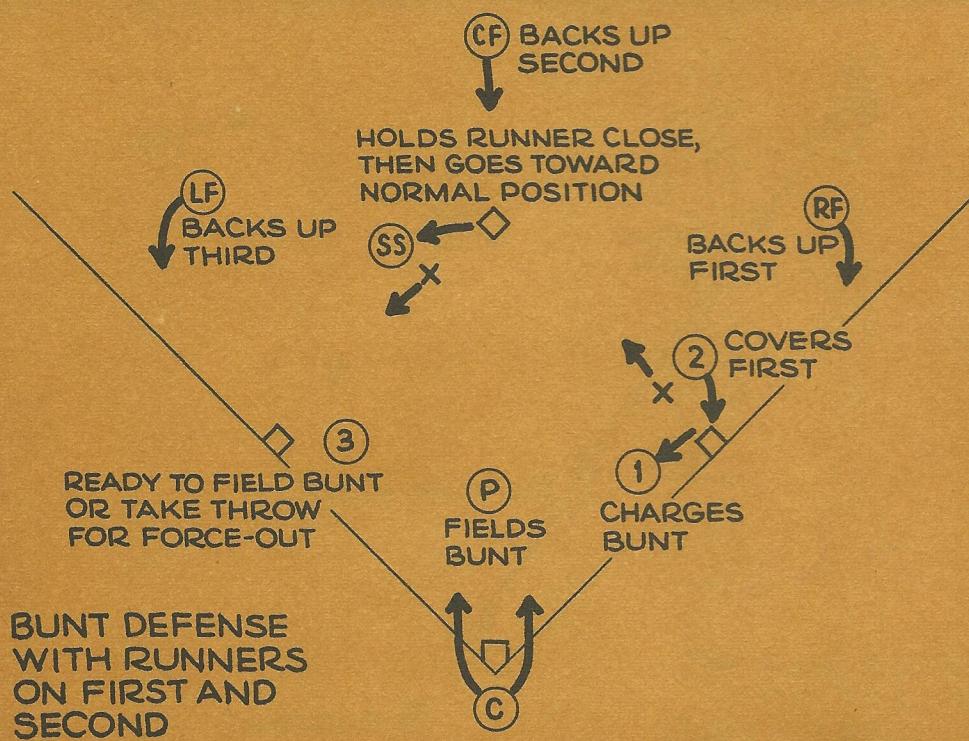
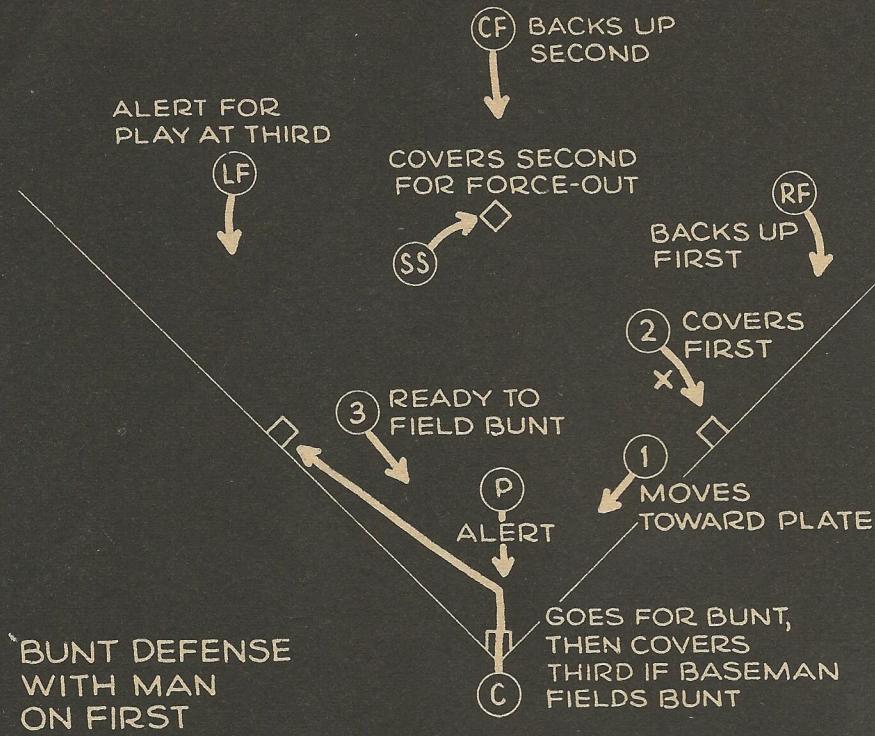
You can't leave anything to chance. Your team must practice all these basic plays over and over again until it becomes habit.

On the following pages are several of the more common situations, and how to defend against them. Study them, practice them, until every man can react automatically to every situation.









## COACHING TIPS

1. Always know the inning, the number of outs, the score, the strength of the opponents' arms, the speed of the runners on base, and the ability of the next batter coming up.
2. Move up close to the runner to talk to him between pitches.
3. Remind the runner of everything that bears on the situation such as: number of outs, where the defense is playing, any offensive play that may be on, when to play safe, throwing ability of the outfielders, when to tag up or go halfway, the catcher's arm, the danger of a possible line drive, etc.
4. With a runner on base, ignore the pitch (that's the runner's responsibility) and keep your eye on the baseman for a possible pick-off.
5. Signal a runner whether to slide (palms down), stay up (hands up), or keep going (waving the arms).
6. When a runner nears third, move up the line toward the plate so that you can advise the runner at the very last moment.
7. Have a runner on third tag up immediately on any ball hit into the air.
8. With no outs, have a runner on first or second tag up on a fly ball. Have him go halfway with one out or whenever there's any question of the ball being caught.

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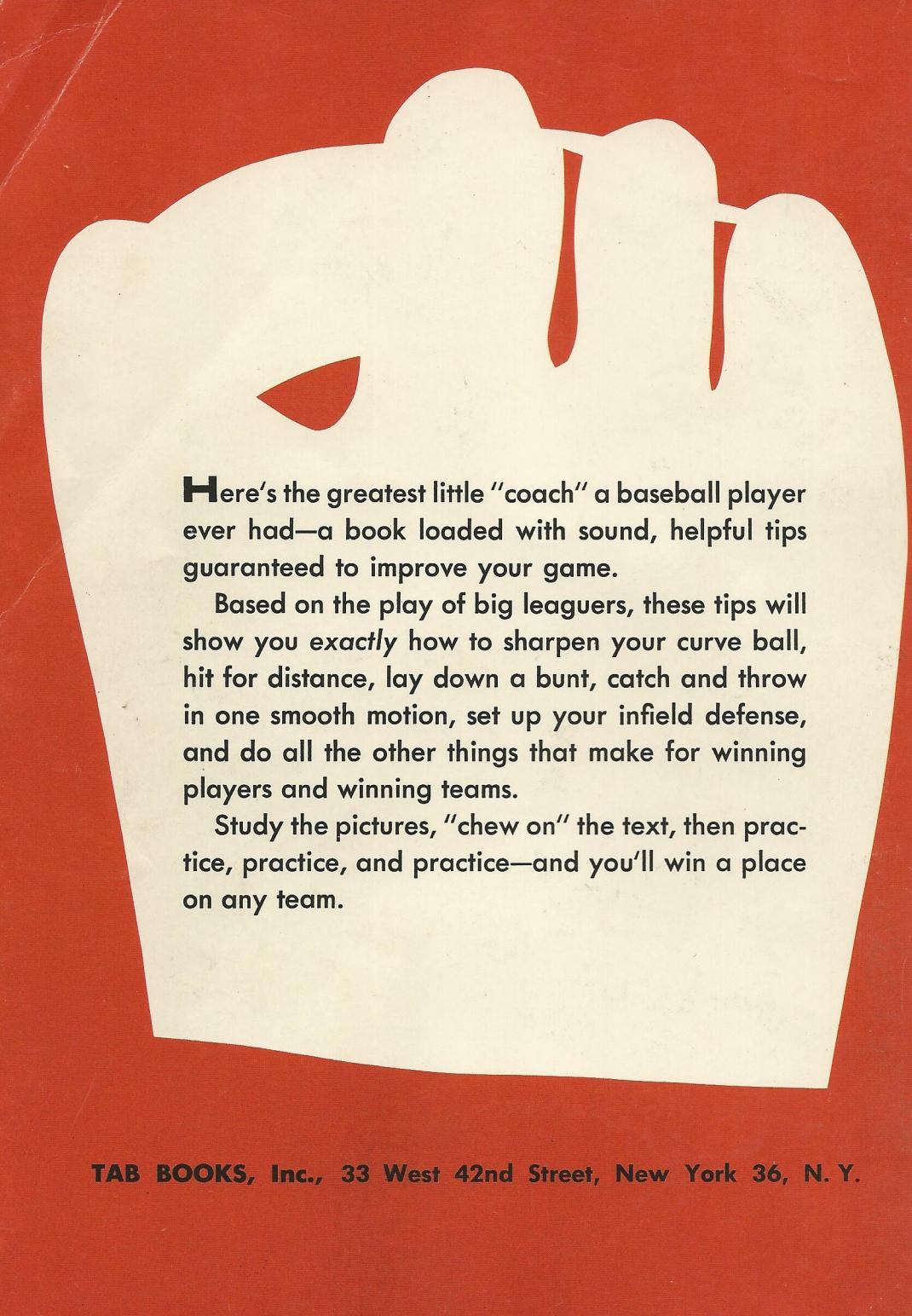
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